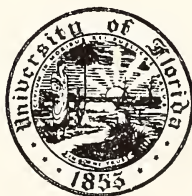


University of Florida Libraries




The Gift of

Leslie Gaskins

COLLEGE
COLLECTION





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
LYRASIS Members and Sloan Foundation

<http://archive.org/details/mybrothermyenem00wils>

MY BROTHER, MY ENEMY



*My Brother,
My Enemy*

by

MITCHELL WILSON

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

COPYRIGHT 1952, BY MITCHELL WILSON

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS BOOK IN EXCESS OF FIVE
HUNDRED WORDS MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM WITHOUT
PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE PUBLISHER

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO. 52-9073



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To Helen



Chapter One

Years after this story begins, the air-line crash officials and the state police were examining the effects that had been scattered only a few hours before over the side of the mountain, and they came across the old snapshot in Margot's purse. Like the matched suitcase and other expensive trinkets which had miraculously fallen clear before the ultimate explosion, the bright red bag had the twinkling innocence and vitality of all survivors of catastrophe. Margot's ninety-five-dollar purse lay unhurt on the examination table and mutely proclaimed the superior durability of things over people: the oldest truth in the brief history of the human race.

Now a ninety-five-dollar purse at any time comes under the category of luxury goods. The accident occurred in 1929, in the gayest, richest days of a golden whirl; yet even then the red handbag was so uniquely the possession of an extremely rich lady that nobody could see any connection between the late owner and the girl in the five-year-old picture. Margot had naturally been listed on the passenger manifest under her married name, a name which at once explained her ability to own such a purse, but no one at the time knew of any connection between that name and the faded MALLORY of the garage signboard under which the three young people stood in the photograph.

MALLORY BROS — GARAGE, said the sign, painted just above the double swing doors of an old barn; and in the entrance a shrewd and joyous girl in her early twenties stood between two young men. They were all three squinting slightly against the direct sun and smiling. The family resemblance, even to the self-conscious smiles, was as obvious as any painting of the young Medicis before they fulfilled the promise of their ultimate power. The young men, actually tall boys, towered over her and they were in their shirt sleeves, the present century's

equivalent of Renaissance armor. Ken was holding up a monkey wrench with mock majesty, while the younger and taller brother, on Margot's left, had his hands awkwardly in his pockets, but his hollow eyes looked straight into the camera with the wary intelligence and sad sweet smile of a homely young man.

Margot had her arms looped through those of her brothers as if she had been urging them forward, having halted only for the instant the picture was taken, and as soon as the button was clicked, on she would press again, leaving the garage behind without a backward glance. Her goal, to which she herself was driven, was somewhere over the horizon towards a golden land she had heard about with a longing heart. Ken, even with his monkey wrench, had one foot slightly forward as if determined to go anywhere she led; but Davy, the tallest brother, had his feet squarely on the ground. He seemed to be standing alone, but actually he was a little ahead of them.

Against the background of sudden death the cheap little snapshot had a poignant bravery. It was a picture of three young people with hope, youth and their high ambitions, and it showed them with all their meager possessions except one. It showed the garage by which they lived; the clothes they wore, for they owned little more; and it showed the front half of the boys' secondhand Dodge roadster with the university pennant of the engineering school on the windshield.

The one possession that wasn't shown in the picture hadn't yet been shown to anyone, for it was still not much more than a few scattered sketches, some calculations in a notebook, and an idea in the minds of the two brothers. The idea, though, was the bridge across which Margot was able to pass in less than five years from the Midwest garage to the casual possession of a ninety-five-dollar purse, to a name that was instantly recognizable to anyone who even occasionally glanced at the financial news and, of course, to her senseless death as a passenger on a luxury air liner.

The idea, even if it had been shown to the crash investigators, would still in 1929 have been unintelligible to them, but twenty years later they and the entire country would be so used to it, and so enmeshed in all its implications, known and still unrealized, that it became hard to remember a time when it wasn't so.

Along with the lipstick, the compact, the handkerchief, the cigarette case and the fifteen-hundred-dollar roll of bills for casual traveling expenses, the unexplained old snapshot was passed from hand to hand until it reached the tabulating clerk from the insurance company at the

end of the line. He entered the item in his book and was about to toss the picture on the pile of effects when he paused for a moment, disturbed, without knowing why, by the questioning steadiness in the eyes of the taller brother, Davy, the youngest of the trio. But then the examiner's arm was nudged, and the small rectangle of glossy paper was tossed onto the table. A large envelope with Margot's name on it was stuffed and sealed to be sent to the surviving husband and brothers who were waiting for her, still unaware that she was dead. They were waiting to celebrate the fulfillment of her greatest dream.

Like the examiner, a great many people had paused for a moment to take another look or to reflect a lingering thought about Davy Mallory, who was only a self-conscious twenty in the photograph. That is why this is mostly Davy's story. And while Margot was the one who urged and carried them forward, and Ken was more than willing to go, it was Davy who could see above both their heads. He saw the same horizon that they did, but he also saw a more distant one beyond, where there was no sunlight, no love, no pride; for with the dark fulfillment of every promise they had ever made to themselves, there also went too much more.

For Davy carried in his eyes even then the shadow of man's ultimate sadness. You sometimes thought about him after he had gone because you sensed that he had seen the dark things ahead; not only for himself, but for you and for every man who lives in our time or comes after; and you were reluctant to ask him what it was.

Davy Mallory's story begins most properly not with himself, nor with his sister Margot, nor even with his god — his older brother Ken. It begins rather with the appearance in their lives of a man who came as a portent of the future, both his own and theirs — the way sometime, on a long journey, you might pass through a strange town apparently no different from a hundred other towns left behind on the way, and in that town you might glance down a tree-lined street of houses, apparently no different from other streets of houses, without the faintest heart-stab of premonition that someday one of the houses on that street in this nameless town will be the home you will live in until the day you die.

That particular day, late in May, 1925, started for Douglas Vollrath like any other day. He awoke early, stared at the ceiling and then, as if driven, burst out of bed. The big house had been bought for him

by his secretary on the telephone, sight unseen, only a few weeks before. These had been the specifications — “Something decent, that’s all. Lots of room, a good modern pantry and kitchen, at least three bathrooms, privacy, but not too far from town. If it’s got some kind of view, fine, but it’s not important.” Nothing seemed important to Vollrath but the aviation plant he was adding to his collection of industrial possessions.

He got out of bed with the usual nameless tension in his heart telling him to hurry hurry hurry without saying the race he was in, the prize if he should win, or the penalty if he should fail; with the same residue of anger as if left over from some unexpended fury of the night before, but he had always awakened with it. He had lived with it as long as he could remember. That was one of the ways he recognized himself each day.

His man Arthur had been up for hours, and Vollrath murmured a polite, toneless “Good morning” to the servant and then ate quickly in silence. Outside in the long driveway his car was waiting, polished and gleaming in the beautiful day. Only when he got behind the wheel did he begin to feel some resilience.

He drove the big, low, open Cunningham much too fast for the road, but just beneath the speed where the heavy car would begin to weave. It flashed along, like a baby-blue needle pulling a thick brown thread of dust. His body began to relax, grateful for the cushioned pummeling of the tires’ thunder, the engine’s growl and the wind. Every one of his senses had to be battered in order to assuage the thrusting impatience that always beset him at the outset of every new venture of the past five years.

In the few weeks he had been out here, he had allowed himself to serve an apprenticeship to the engineers inherited from the previous management. Today, though, he was going to take over. He had more assurance and a greater sense of his financial power, both inherited and acquired, than many men twice his age. Yet, on such a brilliant morning, he knew he was young and would stay young forever. He felt indestructible. Right now, this minute, he felt that if he were to give in to the urge to smash the car into a roadside tree he could climb out of the wreck and saunter off, absolutely unharmed.

The open highway was a straight gray southward line, rising and falling along the center of the lush green undulations of farmland. He felt omnipotent riding down the very center of the entire country, and his mind could see thousands of miles on either side. Beneath

the morning sun on his right, the checkered terrain of barns, silos and green fields extended east through a hundred smoking cities all the way to the glinting windows of New York and beyond to East Hampton's sun-hazy beach. He knew every square inch of the way. On his left, the pastures rolled to the horizon and became two thousand miles of wheat field, mine slag and mountains clear to San Francisco. From everywhere about him, he sensed a continental tumult of human endeavor and revelry. The clear morning air seemed to vibrate with the subdued vitality of the entire country. Urgency burned him so that the morning drive into town was a blur, made pleasurable only by the smooth power of the car.

Like an explosion in the back of his mind, he suddenly realized that he loved the car, as if this crucial appraisal had been waiting weeks for his judgment. He imagined himself saying, "Why, I've owned Cadillacs, Locomobiles, a Rolls and an Isotta in my time, but this is the baby that beats them all."

Then the torment of youthful embarrassment drenched him. Anyone making such a remark, he knew, was a vulgar show-off; and anyhow, no matter *how* true, for someone only twenty-five years old to say "*In my time . . .*" God! He hated the boyishness that went with being young.

A sign flashed by:

WELCOME TO WICKERSHAM — THE WONDER CITY
INDUSTRY — CULTURE — STATESMANSHIP
STATE CAPITAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

As he sped over the next rise, the gleaming toylike town rose abruptly into distant view. A swooping dip, another rise, a long shallow ninety-degree arc, and the town slid a cobbled street under him, then attacked him from the right with a trolley line swerving in to cut him off. But he was willing to play the game and he outmaneuvered the town.

He glided onto its back and slithered along the silken steel of the tracks.

He glanced down at the dashboard array of dials and meters. The gas needle was approaching *Empty*. Down the shabby street a way he saw a garage with a gasoline pump, and steered over to it.

A sign outside said MALLORY BROS — GARAGE.

The building was really an old barn: unpainted, plastered with Bull

Durham posters and a faded ad for Mail Pouch. The double door in front was closed and bolted.

He was about to drive away when a small door in the side of the garage opened. Into the sunlight stepped a young girl in her early twenties. She had a delicate triangular face with high cheekbones. Beneath her deep-crowned green hat (Ah, that Green Hat, he thought) she had fair brown curly hair and gray eyes whose slant suggested calm and patient intelligence. Her slight inward smile made her lips curve like those of a sun-warmed young cat, amused by a world more ancient than it knew. Dressed meticulously in inexpensive clothes, she was carrying a purse and putting on her gloves. For a working girl, he conceded, she had a great deal of poise. He watched her from his low throne, prepared to accept her notice.

She paused, glanced up at his eyes — at the car — without a flicker of surprise, and then continued on as if she had seen such automobiles every day of her life. He knew that she hadn't.

"The mechanic inside?" His voice was direct and ruthlessly impersonal.

She stopped, still smoothing her gloves as she looked up at him again, apparently no more surprised that he had spoken to her than she had been at the sight of him in the first place.

"The boys are spending the day up at the University. The garage is closed. There's another about a mile down the street towards town." She had a low, clear voice.

"And if I don't have enough gas to go that mile?"

Without expression she measured the sarcasm behind his bland face. Then she glanced down at her wrist watch and abruptly drew off her gloves. She had small hands, but she had once worked hard with them.

"All right," she said. "How much do you want?"

"Now, look! I didn't mean . . ."

"It's all right," she replied with a mild and pleasant insistence that told him she knew that he *had*, if only for the moment, meant it. "I've done this often enough. After all, I used to run the place all by myself."

She unceremoniously wedged her gloves and purse against the small bullet-shaped light on the top of the gleaming fender. Vollrath watched her touch his car that way without a word as if he hadn't noticed the impertinence. Then he sat back, allowing her to work for him. She could probably be had for a dinner, or even a ride in the car, he thought, paying her back for her treatment of his pride.

"You're not one of the Mallory brothers then," he said.

Her answering smile unsettled him by its spontaneity. He was no longer so sure that her coolness had been simply a means to gain his attention. She laughed.

"I'm the Mallory sister," she said, turning the pump crank. Her narrow hands had capability. Her fragile triangular face glowed with the mild exertion. "I work downtown. Davy and Ken run this place when they don't have classes. But they're getting ready now for their finals up at the Engineering College."

The whole gratuitous explanation seemed so plump with pride in her brothers that he felt hidden from her sight behind it. A puncturing impulse stabbed him to say, "When they finish up their course, tell them to drop over to the new Vollrath plant. I may be putting on a few more engineers."

Then, after a moment, the suppressed boast grated on his own sensibilities so crudely that his pulse of anger became a blush of shame. He glanced at her to see whether she had known how closely he had missed making a fool of himself. Their eyes met and she turned away, not in any confusion but because there was nothing to hold her interest.

When she finished, he paid her, and watched her wipe her hands delicately with a rag, leaving her gloves and bag still on the car. She was unhurried, yet he couldn't find even a trace of studied insolence in her disregard for him.

"I'll give you a lift downtown. I'm going through the Square."

"No thanks." Again her smile was spontaneous. "The trolley stops right here."

Her rebuff made him withdraw to formality.

"I was only trying to be neighborly, you know."

"Oh, I *know*!" she said. And he knew finally that she was seeing straight through him.

"Thanks for the gas," he said, and pulled out of the drive with his motor roaring. He sat angrily at the wheel without glancing back. For he knew that if his car had been smaller or shabbier she might have gone with him; and he had a vivid picture of the smile in her slanted gray eyes and on her upward-curving lips as she walked towards the trolley stop.

Not because of anything she had said or he had said, but because of what she had made him feel and *not* say, he mentally shook his fist at her and murmured, "Baby, you owe me something!"

Two days later, at a little after eight in the morning, the shining Cunningham pulled off the street in front of the Mallory garage. Again, the two front doors were closed. Vollrath's first impulse was to bear down on the horn and blow for service because he felt so flamboyantly alive.

At the plant, he had been a smashing success in everything he had wanted, and only two men had had to be fired to quell the uproar of resentment; now he felt the lines of authority firmly in his hands.

The girl from the garage still piqued him, but he assumed that she had made an impression only because of his mood that morning. All he had to do was take another look at her. She was probably just a cheap shopgirl after all.

At the end of one minute he lost his patience. He left the car and strode up to the side door of the building, angry with the girl who had made him wait, but far more with himself for caring.

He pushed into a silent darkness full of odors — motor oil, gasoline and the persistent maltiness of hay and feed that had been gone for years. An Exide Battery placard carried an extension — hand-painted — FLATS FIXED — 50¢. He turned his head slightly because he was holding the door between himself and the only light in the place, a pale cone of yellow shining down on an old desk littered with open books — engineering texts.

In the half-light, a young man sat looking up at him with a pencil to his lips. The mechanic was only about twenty, with deep-set blue eyes and an expression that was either deliberate rudeness or unbroken preoccupation. Vollrath had intended to ask for the girl, but he grasped at the chance to keep from looking like a fool in his own eyes.

"What about some gas? I'm in a hurry."

The mechanic lazily tossed his pencil to the desk and watched it fall as if he were thinking of how best to put his answer.

"When those doors are closed, we're not open for business." His pleasant, deep voice was young, but with the firmness of being patient with someone even younger. "We'll be open in another hour."

"You the only one here?"

"The only one on duty — starting an hour from now." Deliberately he raised his blue eyes to Vollrath.

Vollrath could make out a few shadowy cars in the half-stripped state of total repair. Along one wall was a tool bench with a battered top, the outline of a lathe and a drill press. A broken spring leaned against a pillar like an unstrung bow, and soft white gleams were porcelain spark plugs scattered on an oil pan. There was a pile of discarded tires, and the shapeless blobs that were deflated tubes. On another feebly lit table nearby was a litter of wireless receiving sets, ear-phones and homemade parts. To Vollrath, it seemed as if everything he could see, smell and feel was tacky, cheap and poor.

"What's the matter with you people?" he burst out. "I stopped by here the other day — you were closed. Today you're closed. For God's sake, don't you *want* to make a living?"

In the pale light, the mechanic looked up at him for a moment and then broke into a soft laugh. He rose with the slow deliberation of a lanky man.

"Making a living is the only thing we think about," he said, as if the expression had a wry humor. "OK, you can have your gas."

Out in the bright sunlight, he was a good head taller than Vollrath, with a thin, long, ridged face. He was still carrying the open book in his left hand, as if it were only a pack of cards. The pleasant laugh lingered about his mouth. When he saw the car his smile didn't change, but his eyes became alert with analytical interest. He walked over to the front wheels, bent down and ran his hand gently over the tread of the tires and rims. His expression was still affable, but contained an intelligence that was not going to be shared on impulse. It suddenly dawned on Vollrath that as passionately as he loved to drive, he was careless with machinery, and now all the signs of his carelessness were being coldly exposed.

"How much gas do you want?" Davy asked as he straightened up.

"Fill it!" Vollrath decided to ignore the inspection that had just been finished.

With the book under one arm, Davy arranged the hose and the pump. When he began to turn the crank, he took out the book and read it, expertly flipping a page with his finger when he was ready. Vollrath grew restless.

"I understand that when Norton Wallis was alive, he used to live in this town," he remarked, quoting some Chamber of Commerce literature that had passed through his fingers to be glanced at and then tossed away.

"He still lives here," Davy said, without looking up. "He's old, all

right, but far from dead. Lives back up that hill there." Suddenly his dark eyes were raised from the book and staring straight at Vollrath. "He's a great man," he said quietly, as if to establish his position in case there was any doubt.

"I guess he was," Vollrath said.

"He is right now. People toss his name around, but they don't give a damn or even know exactly what he did. If it weren't for work he did forty years ago you wouldn't be driving this car — there wouldn't *be* any cars. He was ahead of his time, that's all. And ahead of ours too," he added. He glanced at the dial on the pump and then went back to his book. Vollrath let him read for a moment or two.

"So he's still working?"

"Works every day of the week." The book didn't interfere with the answer, and the answer didn't interfere with the reading. He turned another page.

"Does he see people?"

"I visit him every day. Either my brother or I. Mornings."

"Do you work for him?"

"I visit him," Davy said again. He was looking at Vollrath once more. "We're friends."

Davy went back to his book. After a few more minutes the pumping stopped, and the young man returned to life and friendliness as abruptly as when his soft laughter inside the garage had ended his preoccupation.

"My sister noticed your car the other day."

"You don't say!" Vollrath remarked with a sarcasm so delicate that only he was aware of it.

"She said you've got a shimmy in your front wheel."

"She said that, did she?"

"But she's wrong. I've watched you myself the past few weeks you've been driving past. Your wheels are out of line. You'll have to get them straightened."

Vollrath got into the car, damned if he'd give him the work.

"It'll just have to wait. I haven't got the time."

"Neither have I," said Davy, agreeing with him.

With the book held in his crossed hands before him, he glanced with appreciation along the lines of the automobile. Suddenly his smile broke with the same spontaneity his sister had. The smile had an unusually disarming sweetness for a man, and it made him look a little shy. "It really *is* a nice car," he said.

The tone made Vollrath involuntarily turn his head to stare at him — for while the words made the sense that Vollrath had been expecting, they had been given quite another meaning.

"You sound as if you intend to get one yourself pretty soon."

Davy colored and then smiled as if amused that Vollrath had finally made some sense.

"I suppose that's just what I did mean," he said reflectively. "At least for my brother. What *I* want, Mr. Vollrath, I guess I just don't know."

With his mouth hanging open at the sound of his own name, Vollrath watched the tall young mechanic walk away. The sudden awareness that he had been known all the time made everything the boy had said take on new meanings. It was one thing for a man to be cool and off-handedly independent in the presence of a stranger. To Vollrath, it was very much something else for someone who knew his name to do him a favor by selling him gas, to read a book in his presence, to tell him casually to take his business elsewhere, and then compliment him by telling him that his car was good enough for one garage mechanic, but not quite the thing for his brother.

The other day, Vollrath had been reasonably sure that the sister's poise had a conscious purpose, but there was nothing artful about this boy today. Vollrath drove off slowly, thoughtfully. For a moment he didn't know what he was thinking except that he knew he would be acutely uncomfortable to have this boy working for him. He couldn't remember that he had ever made that kind of flat decision about anyone ever before, a decision of fear; and for a while it made him uneasy, as if he were suddenly aware that he had overlooked something about himself — something important.

Bending his head a little to pass through the door, Davy went back into the garage; as usual, completely unaware of the impression he had made. He was so used to seeing other people turn their heads to watch the progress of his older brother that he never saw the heads that turned to follow his own path. Whatever absorbed his interest at the moment — whether it was a person, an idea, or an invention he might never build but whose details he had to work out in his mind — that was what he concentrated on: deaf, blind and stupid to everything else.

He tossed his book onto the disorderly pile on the desk. This next half hour was set aside for the daily visit he had to make — a ritual that had started years ago. In his heart, he dreaded the trip up the

hill these days, but still he poured out the five gallons of aviation gasoline to the full measure and picked up the five-gallon can of acetone which he had brought the day before from the University, paid for out of his own pocket even though Norton Wallis could easily afford the trivial sum. Yet Davy never considered himself the giver of the two.

He picked up the two cans and returned to the sunshine outside. The weight bowed his thin shoulders, but it could never balance the heaviness in his heart that always came now when he started up the long hill that led to all the back yards of Prescott Street.

3

Sunlight lay on the threshold of the old man's workshop, where Davy paused, and sunlight lay in squares on the machine-crowded concrete floor within. Golden brilliance poured through the line of windows and from the skylights: glinting, sparkling indiscriminately from surfaces and points of polished metal. The sun had no sense of time or fashion. It draped light on the knobs and blocks of the new miller presented with the compliments of the Cleveland Milling Machine Company. And just as brightly the sunshine glistened on the old Lamport lathe, dated in delicate curlicue *Hartford — 1878*, a museum piece now with its pantaloons of iron leaves on legs that ended in sturdy lion claws. The Lamport had been rebuilt ten times over to suit Wallis's changing fancy and was still used for special facing jobs. Neither the machine nor its decorations would seem particularly old-fashioned to a man seventy-eight years of age.

When Davy appeared in the doorway, the old man did not look up from the small brass tube he was examining through a magnifying lens. Even seated on his stool, he looked tall and stooped under the weight of heavy shoulders. His pink skull was bald with a fringe of white hair in back that needed cutting. His face was long and fleshless except for a strong beaked nose. Blind to anything beyond a few feet away, he refused to wear glasses. He turned the piece slowly a few inches from his face.

"Ken?" he asked. He sounded kindly. "That you, son?"

"No." Davy's voice was deliberately pleasant. He swung the cans into the shop. "And you know damn well it's *not* Ken."

Wallis turned with irritation at the failure of his petty malice that blew through him these days in testy little gusts. He slammed the piece of metal on the workbench.

"You sound as if Ken wouldn't bother to come visit me any more!"

Davy rested the cans near the experimental rocket engine on the floor. "I didn't sound like that at all," he said quietly. "Ken comes here same as I do. How did the nozzle come out?"

"What do you care?" said Wallis turning his back. "It came out fine."

"Was the taper OK?"

"Fine."

"The screw feed work all right?"

"Fine," Wallis snapped. "I said 'fine.' Stop pestering me."

Davy worked as if he had noticed nothing, for he knew that all along the old man was being tormented with shame. It was as if Norton Wallis were now two selves. Inside him was a laconic man who would forever have the youthful vitality of thirty, when he had first started his independent work on the combustion engine. Outside was the crabbed arthritic shell, the creature of bitter moods greedily demanding love and generously giving it, who nine years before had befriended three half-starved runaway kids whom the younger self would never have noticed. This outer self was now pleading with an orphaned granddaughter in Milwaukee to come live with him—a girl whose parents the other Norton Wallis had been too busy to know.

Davy spoke only to the inner, younger Wallis, driving the old man to desperation, for neither by flapping his arms nor by jumping up and down in petulance could the old man seem able to interrupt the understanding conversation between the stranger within himself and this tall, craggy, admiring boy. He turned for a moment. "And don't pour that stuff! I'll do it myself. You slop everything."

Davy unscrewed the caps and went about filling the apparatus tanks. Wallis could no longer lift heavy weights, and Davy and Ken always found an excuse to manage the more cumbersome loads for him.

"I have to pour it," Davy said. "I need the cans back."

"Well, be careful."

"I'm always careful."

The old man peered blindly in the direction of the acetone's gurgle through the funnel.

"Do you always have to have the last word?" he demanded.

"No," said Davy. "You can have it."

Wallis merely grunted with fury, and then, his lips compressed, he turned once more to the work in his hand.

The liquid bubbled noisily from the tilted can and the icy stench of acetone rose into the air. Davy stepped back to avoid the vapor, and his hand rested on a lathe. Immediately he recalled a picture of an ancient Greek city. The word "city" had always connoted majesty, yet this small cluster of white buildings could have fitted entirely into Capitol Square downtown. There were white-clad human figures in the streets, and Davy had peered at them intently with a curiosity beyond measure because these white shapes were men who had lived three thousand years before. He frowned now, wondering why the memory had flashed into his mind. He moved his hand. His moving hand stroked the lathe and Davy suddenly realized that his fingers had stirred the memory that a man named Glaucon had invented the lathe that long ago in just that sort of city.

This Glaucon had also invented the anchor, so his neighbors could sail into coves where no one else could remain; and for the wealth such trade brought to this small city, Glaucon had also invented the lock and key. The ocean liner's captain making port, the machinist in the ten-acre factory and the householder fumbling at his apartment door neither knew the man's name nor cared, but at their shoulders stood a man from thirty centuries back; and they had just blindly taken from his hand what they needed most at the moment.

When Davy had been very young, he read indiscriminately, until one day he wondered at the age of the world in terms of a human lifetime. He took the Bible's allowance of three score and ten and was then profoundly shocked to discover that less than a hundred human lifetimes had rolled away since the fire-flecked darkness of unrecorded history.

It couldn't be, he had protested with a primitive fear, it couldn't be! Less than a hundred men! He had stared into the night as a trolley rumbled past: a worm of lighted windows boring through the black air. In that small swaying island that raced from the darkness at one end of the avenue to the other darkness down the street were the pitifully few men needed to form a chain that would extend from this *now* to that distant misty primeval *then* when man had been a wild hunted creature with the mind of a fright-shocked child.

Since the time of that realization, Davy had been ridden by the

sense of the thinness of history behind him. This was no leisurely world where progress had been fitful and tortuous over slowly turning centuries. For when man first learned to make the earth work for him through the earth's moods and habits, a stunning explosion was started — an explosion of creativity that was still continuing with ever expanding violence, proliferating its power at a maniacal rate.

Ken too could play with the numbers of time, foreshortening or stretching them for the mind's examination, but to Ken it would always be a game. In the reassurance of Ken's presence, Davy could turn his head from the fearful sense of the briefness of human time. Yet in Ken's absence, and in Norton Wallis's presence, the dark awareness returned; for of the few score lifetimes that staked out the whole duration of human history like street lights along a lonely road, Norton Wallis's was sure to be one.

The small vapor-explosion engine Wallis had built in his spare time at Milwaukee Machine & Boiler began to grow larger as he worked on it. In 1892 he put his engine into a carriage and taught a man in Lansing how to manipulate the controls, but nobody else wanted to buy another. Five years later he went into business in Racine with a retired blacksmith named Carter. They called their car the Dauphin. Seven hand-built Dauphins sold in three years, and the partners decided to call it quits. Besides, even then, Wallis had begun to feel that the piston engine had serious limitations.

Yet if Wallis in his youth had known a man whose age then was what Wallis's was now, that other old man might have heard the ragged musket fire of the Revolution, quarreled in a tavern about Thomas Jefferson, and with his own eyes seen the smoke-belching marvel of the first steam engine at work. Yet here was Norton Wallis sitting before a window for a better light to polish a fragment from a motor that might still, in Davy's old age, propel men through the midnight stillness of the outer void to explore another planet.

Davy took down the empty drum of acetone and then poured the aviation gas into its own charging chamber.

"I'm giving you five gallons of each today," he said to Wallis's back. "Tomorrow we're going to be up at the Hill all day taking our finals."

"Sure you're going to pass?" Wallis asked without turning. The dry unreasoning anger made his voice brittle and biting.

"We'll pass, all right. Ken and I could pass right now."

"Don't talk to me about Ken! Ken would never have gone to college if you hadn't made him. Everybody thinks you follow Ken around

because you let him do all the talking. You tag after him all right, but only to be sure he's doing things the way *you* want them done."

Davy said nothing, betrayed by a far-off memory. He ignored the inner question for as long as he could and then stamped on the possibility that anyone could make Ken do anything. Ken was the older brother, the leader. Sometimes, Davy conceded, he gave Ken advice, but that was all. It had been years since Davy had unfolded the memory of when he first discovered he could make things go his own way. . . .

4

The air was black and stifling inside the boxlike hut that stood by the stream. The boy crouched over the machine, working feverishly. He kept the door closed because he was hiding from human eyes a quarter of a mile away, where tiny figures of men bent and rose in the rhythm of haying.

As he worked, he jerked his flashlight back and forth between the generator and the awkward circuit diagram he had drawn on a torn sheet of paper. A battered alarm clock with curious wire connections ticked loosely on the floor.

He was so nervous that he flinched in panic when his own shadow dashed over the low ceiling as if to smother him. He grasped the flashlight from the floor and the shadow fled, leaving him only pure relief.

In spite of his height, he was not yet twelve. He was frightened by the musty darkness, but he was terrified by his own daring, for with a plan conceived by his own mind and carried out by his own hands, he had just seized the world by the tail. At seven o'clock the great beast would awaken, either to smash him for his audacity or waddle off with monstrous docility to do his bidding. At seven o'clock all the electrical power on his uncle's farm was going to stop itself on his command — given now, three hours earlier.

His heart was still pounding as he stepped outside into the sunlight. He stood flat against the door for a moment as his intelligent blue eyes, wary as an animal's, glanced about to see if he had been observed. But the forest, the clearing and the fields beyond were heavy with afternoon silence.

In that spring of 1916, everything had grown with lush abandon,

even boys. Davy was as tall now as his brother, who was a year and a half older; and to be as big as one's god seemed the next step to godhood. However, he was a long way from filling the patched blue shirt meant for a barrel-chested man like his uncle. The ragged jeans were still loose, even though his sister had cut away the entire seat and made a new seam that placed the side pockets almost together in the back. The crotch, too tight for his uncle's great thighs, hung baggily to Davy's knees.

Yet for all the shabby grotesqueness of his clothes, his unkempt hair, the thinness of new growth in his browned arms and legs, he was graceful as he ran crouching to the edge of the field, pursued by demons of fear, led on by the lure of possible triumph.

At the barn, he dashed in for the whetstone that was his errand and then darted out, holding up his loose trousers as he loped towards the men working in the north field. Suddenly it occurred to him that he himself might have committed a far greater transgression than anything Ken had threatened. Then he resumed his stride, deciding to say nothing at all to anyone until he saw how things came out.

He was out of breath when he reached the men. Only Ken's face was cold with accusation for having been left alone, but Davy gave his pants a frantic hitch, grabbed a pitchfork and scrambled up beside his brother.

It was hard to keep up with Ken that afternoon because every time Ken jabbed the fork into the hay, he was making the thrust into the fat old meanness of Uncle George. Davy supposed that when you had sworn to kill a man the next time he laid the strap on you, and when that time was only a few hours off, you'd certainly better practice up beforehand. Even Uncle George seemed to be practicing. He had promised to lick Ken to within an inch of his life at seven o'clock, and Davy knew that Uncle George was a man who liked to get ready for what was coming. In the tiny part of Davy's heart that was not dedicated to Ken, he was fervently glad that this time he wasn't included in the sentence.

At length, a stir of northern air thinned the heat to evening. The men stood erect to ease their backs and flex the stiffness from their hands. They were drenched with sweat. Uncle George mopped his big chest with his shirt and then looked at Davy in the way that always made the boy stand very still with fear.

"You be waiting with your brother," Uncle George said flatly. "When I sent you for that stone, I meant run all the way, both ways.

Everybody on this lousy farm has to work. That goes for you, David; for you, Kenneth; and you can tell that sister of yours it goes for her too." He paused for a moment. "Just fix it between you who gets whipped first."

Davy's face was as impassive as his uncle's, but his stomach had shriveled. The two boys fell behind the others. Davy's wrist was grasped tightly. From the corner of his eye he saw Ken's face tight, thin and handsome with desperation. This was Ken's face, Davy knew, when he was winding himself up to the breaking point to meet some secret inner test he had set for himself. And Ken had never failed.

"I'll be first, kid, so I can get it over," Ken whispered.

"You'd really do it?"

"I said I would, didn't I?" Ken was bitter as if the whole world had trapped him with his spoken word. "If I said it, I'll do it. Remember, I'm first!"

Supper in the kitchen was a silent affair for everyone but Uncle George. Margot was barely sixteen, but since she did the cooking, she sat at the foot like a woman. Her eyes were hard and angry for her brothers, and she seemed a lot older than she was. Uncle George sat at the head in his reinforced chair, braced beneath, and broadened in the seat for his massiveness. His rumbling voice, big and deep, rasped on Davy's waiting nerves; but even so, the boy could neither discern nor understand the apology and self-justification behind the bitter recounting of the successive failures that had been George Mallory's life.

He clenched his powerful fists and looked down at them in the rage of helplessness. Everyone was silent with him. The kitchen clock said five minutes to seven, and the evening quiet suddenly slid to another level of stillness. A continual throbbing was so much part of the farm sounds that its absence was like a sustained gasp of surprise.

"The generator's stopped," said Margot.

Davy's heart sang with secret triumph. He had done something Ken had never dared to do, and he had done it all by himself. At that moment he didn't care whether or not Uncle George did give them the beatings—nothing could spoil this inner wild conviction that he was finally the bigger brother.

Uncle George looked at them, and Davy saw his hatred of their wild clannishness. Then he made a curt sign for them to go; the repair was far more important than the beating.

Ken was almost drunk with relief as he and Davy fled across the flat sunlight that lay on the fields like golden smoke. He staggered as he ran, leaping joyously when there was nothing to jump over.

"What luck!" he laughed. "If the generator hadn't gone, that fat old bastard would be dead now with a bellyful of pitchfork!"

A few hours ago, Ken's threat would have sounded like a pronouncement of implacable fate. Now, from a boy no taller than himself, Davy found it a little foolish.

"Wasn't luck at all, Ken. I was the one who fixed it. I shorted the generator."

"You? Hell, you were in the kitchen all the time!"

"That's the whole idea. Remember in *Popular Mechanics* the circuit the Germans used for a bomb? I rigged up that busted clock so that the hands would short to ground at seven. Nothing's burnt but the fuse. We've got loads of time."

In the shack, Ken examined the clock and wires, while Davy took out Ken's cached box of cigarette butts and lit one for himself without even asking. Ken glanced up when the match flared, but said nothing and returned to the clock.

"Why didn't I think of this?" Ken said softly. "We can do this any time we want. Wait'll I tell Margot what we did!"

They waited almost two hours before they turned on the generator and went back, with Davy silently thinking how different people looked when you got to be their size.

The third floor of the frame house had never been finished. Uncle George divided the space by stringing up a white curtain of cheesecloth. A cot on one side was for Margot and a mattress on the other was for the boys, but this was a privacy for which they had never asked and for which they had no use. After everyone else was asleep, the three used to huddle in the darkness and she would make up wonderful stories of the time to come when they could be together all by themselves. But if she was equally the mother to both before dozing off, her last and tenderest good night was always for Ken.

Margot was waiting for them upstairs in the blue darkness, kneeling on the mattress in the faded petticoat she wore for sleeping. She laughed quietly at their story and then caught Davy to her, kissing him with impulsive pride while he clung to her with the arm he had thrust instinctively about her small waist.

"Why don't we just go away?" he said to please her with her

favorite dream. "Some night, let's tie up the generator and run off. Things here will only get worse and worse."

"Don't you worry," Ken said sharply, watching him. "Soon as I fix Uncle George, everything will be all right."

"Go on!" Davy's arm, still around Margot, was uncomfortable as long as he sat away from her, but he couldn't make himself let go. "You're never going to kill him, so forget it."

"I said I'd kill him!"

"You stop that kind of talk," Margot told him. "It's just plain stupid. Davy's right. I could get a job someplace if I said I was older, and then you kids could go to a real school."

"School!" Davy said derisively. "We could all get jobs."

"You'd go to school!" Margot was sharp. "Both of you. How do you expect to get to be anybody or make those inventions if you're not educated? And you'll go to college too."

"Edison never went to college," said Davy.

She made an impatient gesture that freed her of his arm, and he felt hurt and strange. He hadn't meant to argue with her. "I don't care what I do," she went on. "But you boys are going to amount to something — even bigger than Edison!"

"We could fix up that old flivver in the back of the barn," Davy said impulsively to win her forgiveness. He went on improvising details of the escape without believing in their reality, so that he was shocked when Margot said, "Let's do it! Davy, let's do it!"

His mouth hung open, amazed to find that he was the one to be planning the supreme defiance of Uncle George. Ken should have been doing this, but Ken remained silent. Davy waited for him, and then, still getting no sign of leadership, settled down next to Margot. They went over the plans again until it was late, and then lay down to sleep. But before Margot could turn away, Davy raised himself on one elbow and put his hand on her bare arm.

"Don't I ever get a good night?" he pleaded. "Every night, it's Ken."

"Hey, you — !" Ken's voice tore away from him, as if pride could have stood every betrayal from these two except this.

"Be quiet," Margot said over her shoulder. "Davy's right. And besides, he's the youngest."

"But not the smallest," Davy insisted.

"You lie down," she said.

Again he was enveloped by her warmth and he could feel her soft breath on his forehead as he pressed his face against her.

It was so nice, he thought. He felt a pervading sweetness so deep that he impulsively kissed her throat, hoping that Ken wouldn't see and that she wouldn't mind.

She touched his face with her hand as she stood up and then Davy, still breathless, turned around to sleep, his heart shining in him like a sun.

A month later on a hot still night they were ready for flight. Davy knew what was going to happen to the exact minute, but even so the sudden blackout startled him. Surprise lay in the kitchen, thick as darkness.

"I'll get you the lamp, Uncle George," he said hastily. "I think I saw Margot go over to the barn."

"I don't care who gives me the lamp. Just get it and fix that damn generator. And send your sister up here. She's too big to be out there this time of night."

Outside, in the early darkness, Davy tried to make himself believe that they were really going away from all these scents, sounds and winds that were so familiar. In the days to come Uncle George would realize that even though they had run off, they were good kids. Davy began to feel very sorry for him, but he remembered Margot sitting all alone waiting for them at the shaking wheel of the patched-up Ford down the road.

They were fifty yards from the road when Davy saw the lantern carried by the moving figure behind them. He stopped and touched Ken's arm. Both boys crouched in the brush and then moved sideways. Davy's heart hammered in his throat. He dreaded being caught.

"He's looking for Margot," Ken whispered. "It's your fault. You shouldn't have said she was in the barn."

Davy's fear made his answer sound fierce. "You didn't have any better ideas. Why didn't you say something?"

"Because you seem to be running everything these days, Mr. Big Britches! Soon as he gets into the barn, we run for it."

Faintly, they could hear their uncle's angry voice calling. Ken nudged Davy and they sped across the flat, when suddenly Uncle George's lantern reappeared. The boys slammed themselves down to the ground and watched the light swing along. They were motionless, barely breathing.

"Let's go around by the stream," Ken whispered. "We can get to her that way while he goes out towards the shed."

They wriggled back along the path up a rise and then ran down the other side that led to a tamarack bog. In here, the night was black and blind. An animal bolted nearby, filling them with its own terror as it whipped away through the brush. Davy turned to glance around but Ken kept going.

Blindly, Davy pushed ahead again, straining to see through the dark and at the same time holding up his arms to shield his face from the whipping branches. Then his jeans slipped too far down and he had to hitch them up again. His foot caught in a rock and he pitched forward, unable to see where he was falling. In another moment, he hit water. The sound of his splash roared in his ears and from the depths of dark water about him he knew that he was in the pool just above the race.

He held his breath, waiting to float back up to the surface, but blunt pressure on the back of his head stopped him as his body swirled slowly. He held his breath as if all his strength were concentrated between his eyes and in the bridge of his nose, while his chest felt as if it were bursting. He tried to back up from beneath the overhanging shelf of rock, but he found himself in a still tighter place.

Then, as if he were suddenly making sense of an overheard secret whispered between strangers, he knew that within the next few seconds he would die.

Back in the small pinpoint of his mind that was born before he ever began to breathe, and would remain alive to watch his own death and then be the last of him to die, he was his own most bereft mourner.

In the next moment, with the avidity of starvation, he was gasping for breath in the lovely soft air as Ken pulled him clear and held his head above the surface. He knew that he had been saved and his eyes, still drowned in tears and water, gazed at his brother with bleary adoration.

"You OK?" Ken whispered.

But Davy could only thank him with deluged eyes as he gagged and vomited water in Ken's face. Seeing him bear that further indignity, Davy loved him even more. The big brother was always the big brother, he told himself wildly, and could prove it by saving the kid brother's life. He vowed to spend the rest of his life paying Ken back, and atoning for the rebellion that now seemed to have been almost a sin.

Now, years later, Davy folded up the memory and handed it back, saying coldly to himself that all that happened that day was that he had learned the first principle of an engineer's religion — faith in machines to do exactly what they were built to do. And that had nothing to do with Wallis's unfair accusation that Ken was only another face for Davy. No, Ken was the older brother and everything that it implied. Always was and always would be.

Lost in the reverie, Davy was careless as he lowered the second drum to the cement floor, and it made a harsh grating noise. Wallis turned testily at the sound, ready to storm, to throw everything cruel, everything bitter, anything but his genuine love into the startled face before him. Then he paused for an instant, blinking, and a sudden clearing of his eyes made him seem years younger. The busy engineer deep within him had finished his calculations, made his decision and shoved the old nag peremptorily aside. He spoke in an entirely different voice, thoughtful and to the point. "I'll be able to put the flame chamber together today. That means I'll be ready for the peroxide tomorrow."

Davy stood staring at him. Then he let his hands fall with luxurious relief. These abrupt changes into clarity from opaqueness had the nightmare quality of a sudden smile of reprieve on the lips of his executioner.

"But I just finished telling you," Davy said. "Tomorrow we're taking our finals."

Wallis tried to remember, and then his face lit up with pride. "Come a little closer, son, so I can see you. You're off there in the shadow. There, that's better. So it's the big day, is it? That's fine. But I'm wondering whether it wouldn't be smarter if you fellows got started on some little gadget that's less ambitious than the project you've been talking about — you know, just to start."

Davy shook his head. "We're stuck with this. We don't even get ideas about anything else. Every month we go through hell until we check the Patent Office *Gazette* to be sure that someone else hasn't just beaten us."

"Being first isn't always what counts," Wallis said. "Being best is more important. Hell, you know that."

"But the money is in being first."

"Come on, you don't really give a damn about the money," Wallis said. "Why do you make out that you do?"

Davy glanced at him quickly. "What makes you think so?"

"You don't have to say anything. I can tell. You work because there's something inside that makes you. Even if there was no money in invention, you'd still go on doing it. How do I know? I can tell by the things you think about. And it's the same for Ken, but Ken really thinks it's the money he's after. But even if he gets it, he'll never be satisfied. Ah well, that's how it is."

Wallis shook his head. He was really too old, too experienced, to care for long. "Well, if you're going to start beating your heads against a stone wall, you might as well begin when you're young. That brings us back to me — when do I get that peroxide?"

"This morning," Davy said. There was nothing he wouldn't do for this Wallis. "I'll find the time."

Wallis cocked his head as if he had just heard a second call from a distant voice he had ignored until now. "Listen, I almost forgot—this afternoon that girl is coming—my granddaughter Victoria; you know, the one who's been writing to me. Could you pick her up too? She's due on the three-ten."

"Ken will be back by then. One of us will go."

"I don't want Ken to go. I want *you*. Let her get here intact, not with stars in her eyes. Whatever she does after she gets here is her own business, but let's start off simple."

Davy smiled. "All right, I'll go."

Wallis was absorbed once more in his work. For a moment, fear flickered in Davy's heart that in the next moment the old man's clarity would have gone as suddenly as it came, but Wallis's voice was still sure and firm as he said over his shoulder, "All right, Davy, thanks. Now beat it. We're both busy."

Davy walked out into the sunshine of the morning. Whenever he found Wallis in this lucid mood, Davy felt that he had just been smiled upon by true greatness as measured by the highest standard he knew. His eyes were dark with pride, as if the two simple errands on which Norton Wallis had sent him were twin decorations of merit. And while, half an hour ago, there had been no time to make a few dollars by fixing Douglas Vollrath's car, there now seemed all the time in the world to run up to the University and get the old man some chemicals.

Nor, in his happiness, did it ever occur to him that "getting" was a very delicate way to describe his methods of procurement. He would have been surprised and hurt if the accusation had been made.

6

Davy strode along the top of University Hill and passed the towered red Administration Building. The huge brick fortress overlooked the grassy quadrangle, a quarter of a mile in length, that sloped down to State Street. The broad avenue continued directly to the state capitol a mile away, so that the graduates could march down University Hill and place themselves at the service of the bountiful commonwealth that had educated them free of charge. Exactly how free was open to conjecture. The 1872 legislature had granted the charter under the bitter fire of scandal because state lands up north had been sold for a song to lumber companies, but even so, the members of the 1872 legislature finished that term very much richer than they were at the outset. Nevertheless, the University grew into its own shape and persisted with a life of its own.

As Davy hurried up to the chemistry storeroom, the corridors, bulletin boards, labs and lecture halls were as familiar as his own home, and as drenched with memories. For five years, ever since he had been fifteen, he had raced up and down these steps.

Until the previous June, the course had been four years, but an optional fifth had been added. Only two engineering students had signed up for it, Ken and Davy, and they devoted themselves to cathode-ray work. In a university where the senior college was Engineering, and Engineering seniors were the only men allowed to grow beards — who *had* to grow beards — to be a fifth-year Engineer was to be one rank above the gods.

Davy knew his status and took it for granted as he called the student clerk to the dispensing window of the stock room.

"Charley, give me a gallon of H_2O_2 . It doesn't have to be U.S.P."

"For Christ's sake, Davy. Acetone, OK; but peroxide is tough."

"Well, I need it."

"What for?"

"I cut my finger, that's what for."

The clerk hesitated and then looked at the catalogue. "Do you know what this is going to cost you?"

"It's going to cost me a quarter."

"Make it a half."

"One quarter."

"OK, but I hope you bleed to death." The clerk handed over a metal drum, pocketed the coin and wrote carefully in the Dispensing Account Book — under the column of "Damage and Spill" — "1 gal. H_2O_2 spilled." Then both boys murmured the password that closed every deal at the state's expense: "Timberland."

Davy was fourteen when he discovered that he could actually enter the University. The Engineering librarian had grown tired of kicking out the two skinny ragamuffins who wandered in all the time. Neither kid was noisy, and the blond one, whose hair hung like an upturned floor mop, was content with handbooks and manuals. The other, though, who always needed one hand to hold up his pants, insisted on taking books from the reserved shelves. The librarian got the dark one alone.

"Look, son, better wait until you're a student here."

Davy sat very still for a moment. When he saw that no harm was coming, he said slowly, "But I can't ever get into the University. I don't go to high school."

The librarian hated to lose an argument. "The charter says you don't have to. All you have to do is pass the entrance exam."

Davy glanced down at the physics texts before him. "Can I have these books to study for it?"

"Anybody who registers for the exam gets a probationary certificate for the library. Now beat it, son, I'm busy."

"Who gives out those certificates?"

"I give them out," said the librarian.

"OK. Let me have one."

"I thought you said you didn't go to high school."

"You said I didn't have to."

"Sure, you don't *have* to, but have you got any Latin?"

"You bet," said Davy. "Lots."

"And I suppose you speak algebra too?"

"Yop," said Davy, staring him straight in the eye, contemptuous of the trap that had been set for him. "Algebra, too."

To Davy, the application was only a means to get at the books, but when he told Margot back at the garage, she put down the carburetor she was cleaning. She took off her dirty overalls and put on the one good dress she owned, told Davy to come along, and back they went

to the librarian. She was nineteen at the time, and she said she wanted information as to how her two younger brothers could get to take the examinations. Davy stood by her side, towering over her, awed by her nerve because he knew she didn't understand half the technicalities that were being explained to her.

Ken told her she was crazy: someday he and Davy were going to figure out something that would make a lot of money. But Margot said flatly that she hadn't given up her life for them just so that they could wind up a couple of garage mechanics. They were going to go to college and amount to something.

For a year and a half she drove them. She studied with them and protected them from distraction. The strain on the boys was killing and they were hungry most of the time. In June they passed every examination except Latin. Margot had decided they were not even to attempt it, and they were admitted on probation for one year. By the end of that first year, they were both in the upper half of the class.

In that year, too, Margot finally left the garage. That was the first year after the war, a hard time to go looking for a job. The winter was bleak and people's faces were pinched because of the great coal strike. The first touch of wet thaw was in the air when she finally got into the buying office of Thurn's New York Store.

Because of their garage, the two brothers were rarely able to be at the University on the same days; but when, for one reason or another, both their presences were required, they were always together. They always came down the steps of the Engineering building with Ken in the lead, as if he were running down the side of a hill with the negligent grace of a dancer. The wide bottoms of his trousers did a little flopping dance of their own. He was always bareheaded, his long fair hair slicked back and parted in the center. He wore white shirts with a small butterfly bow and an open-necked, checked woolen lumberjack shirt, tucked smoothly into his trousers so that there was no blousing. Coming down behind him, Davy looked even more than three inches taller. Davy was thin where Ken was slender. Davy skipped down the steps a little clumsily and his entire frame shook. He watched where he was going as if he might fall.

Ken's face was fine-drawn and bony, with eyes that were gray, large and deep-set. His nose was slightly beaked at the bridge and pointed at the tip, with triangular nostrils. His lips were thin, straight and long, and his sudden smile had an unexpected sweetness. For the first year his heart quaked, as if he expected to be tapped on the shoulder and

told, "Hey, you don't belong here, beat it!" After that, he and Davy were always near the top of the class without owing anybody anything. They had been mostly forgiven for being townies, and to hell with those to whom it mattered. If it weren't for his appearance of having a very good time, Ken would have looked arrogant. As it was, his barely suppressed smile, the quick movements of his erect head, gave the impression that he was perpetually on the verge of extending an invitation to the entire world.

Every one of Ken's features, in exaggerated form, made up Davy's face, so that Davy looked dark, craggy and ridged. Davy's blue eyes had a slight faunlike slant, accentuated in color and shape by the deep dark hollows in which they were set. His lips, like Margot's, were long but curved. His hair was almost black, cut so short that it was usually a close-fitting tangle of ringlets.

In a coeducational school where the men had a tradition of ignoring the girl students for those imported from off the campus for parties and proms, where it was considered necessary to drink as much straight alcohol as possible, or at least to pretend to drink it, where it was the fashion to boast of adventures with compliant girls with much talk of "going the limit," while indulging for the most part in not a lot more than a few kisses and some mild manual exploration, Ken violated every rule and was the happier for it. Davy violated no rules because, as far as he was concerned, no rules existed.

The only values he acknowledged were those that made sense to him. He looked questioningly at the world about him, making his own judgments but never stating them publicly if they disagreed with Ken's. No one, least of all Davy himself, realized that he was developing the discipline that could mature into quiet ruthlessness.

During the school year they went only with the coeds, who were just as pretty as the imported girls and, as a matter of fact, *were* the imported girls at campuses in Madison, Ann Arbor and other schools. Ken drank just enough to be sociable. And while the smoother fraternity brothers, the speeds, made such a big hoorah about a little necking, Ken had an affair with almost every girl he dated. If it was necessary to reassure a girl that he truly loved her forever, for the time being it was no lie. He knew too much to share the popular belief that if he should stop seeing the girl she would become wildly promiscuous and end up by going to the dogs. He would simply have fallen out of love, and that could happen to anybody.

He was a gentle, bantering lover, considerate and deft. He never

even hinted publicly about his conquests and was deeply offended when others did. He did confide in Davy, whom he could trust, but Davy never confided such things to Ken. Nobody but Davy's girls knew what happened when Davy went out. Yet Davy's girls, while more studious and serious than Ken's, seemed serenely satisfied.

Davy picked his own girls. He would see one first from a distance, and then watch her smile and the way she moved. His face would be tenderly thoughtful. He never asked anyone about her because the things he would have liked to know he wanted to find out for himself and he didn't want them put into words. He liked to make the first move and so he was never aware of the other girls who might put themselves in his way. He saw only what he was looking for, and so he suffered from the fatal blindness of the self-sufficient.

With every minute of their waking hours so carefully apportioned to the garage, to studies or to occasional evenings with girls, there was no time for either of them to join the usual bull sessions. However, even the most intensive library studying had to be broken up by a cigarette on the library steps, where there was always a knot of engineers discussing the girls who passed, the teams that were yet to be played and, most practical of all, how much money they would be earning five years after graduation. The engineers became devoutly serious on that, and the average figure was seven thousand a year. In 1924, nobody had any doubts about that.

"What about you, Ken?"

Ken smiled. "Davy and I haven't figured it out yet."

"Come on!"

"No kidding. We've got something in mind for ourselves, and it's not taking any old job. I'll tell you this, though—no matter how much we'll be earning annually two years from now or even eight years from now, *ten* years from now, Davy and I ought to have at least a million apiece. Right, Davy?"

"Well," said Davy cautiously, "twelve years is closer to the mark."

In the summer, when the University was closed, Ken and Davy would spend their days repairing transmissions, fixing flats and changing oil; but when evening came, if they weren't too tired, they would wash, shave, put on clean shirts and go down to Page Park to cool off. Page Park was a large quadrangle facing the lake; and in the central lawn between the two war memorials the circular bandstand was lit up every Friday night. The Wickersham Volunteer Town Band wore black frogged military jackets with choker collars, and white duck

trousers that remained bent at the knees even when the men rose to take their bows. They played "Pomp and Circumstance," "Tales of the Vienna Woods" and some marches like "Hail to the Chief." Nowadays they also included for the younger folk some dance tunes—but the rhythm was the stiffly rapid two-four beat of the marches, so that some comedian could always raise a snicker by doing an extravagant Charleston and then pretending to fall down dead of exhaustion.

The summer evenings always started the same way, eating ice cream and leaning against the spiked railings that marked off the walks. In a short time, Davy would be deep in conversation with some other fellow in shirt sleeves who would go through the particular intricacies of his fuel pump. Davy would listen and nod, talking with short, stiff-handed gestures. Ken would wander off after a light dress and probably sit with the girl on one of the benches at the dark end over near the lake. An hour and a Stearns-Knight engine later, the other fellow would say, "Hey, what are we standing here for? See anything good?"

If no girls were passing, one in step with the other even to the provocative motion of the hips, where the straight dresses fitted snugly, then the other fellow would go on with other engines he'd heard about and then, around eleven, the concert well over, he'd saunter off home.

"I'll stick around for Ken," Davy would say.

After the band left, the park was always quiet. There were plenty of deserted benches. The strings of lights along the main walks shone down as if on a deserted stage, and damp earthy odors rose from the grass. Occasionally a stirring of air brought a wisp of muted dance music from the country club around the Point like a rare and expensive perfume, for where the music came from was a place where girls, never seen by day, must be exquisitely beautiful, and the men, in black dinner jackets and white flannels, were worldly, rich and handsome.

Here in the quiet park, an empty bench was a place to dream; and as long as one knew that it was only a matter of time before even the loveliest would be realized, it was easy to be patient.

At length Ken and the girl, bemused and embarrassed, would appear, walking slowly, and Ken would say, "I'm taking her home, kid. Want to come along?"

"No," Davy would answer. "I'll see you later."

Later, Davy would be lying awake in his bunk behind the garage.

"Gee, she was nice," Ken would say. "How'd *you* make out?"

"Fine." Davy's deeply shadowed face would stare up at the ceiling. "Just fine."

When Davy sat alone on a park bench bemused by distant music, or when he stretched out in the sleepless darkness of his bunk and stared at the ceiling, besides dreams of good things to come, he would find himself wondering about meanings and causes. He idly tossed a ball of conjecture from one hand to the other, pausing every so often to rub away a flaw until either the idea fell apart in his fingers or took on the hard polish of sense. Even so he might toss it away, but more often than not, he would drop it into a corner of his mind to show later on to Ken.

One night in the beginning of their senior year, after they had both gone to bed, he suddenly said, "We ought to sign for that fifth year, Ken."

"What?" Ken's voice came sleepily through the dark, fighting against wakefulness as much as the suggestion. "Why? Nobody else is going to."

Davy didn't stir. He merely waited for Ken's voice to die away. "So far, we've been talking about this one invention as if nothing came before it, and nothing's coming after. But we're going to make others possible."

"Well, why not? And what's that got to do with another year? Christ," Ken said, turning angrily on his pillow, "I'm tired of being poor! I don't want to go on being a grease monkey. I want to be rich." Thoroughly awake now, he lit a cigarette, but neither the spurt of light nor the rasp of sound made Davy turn.

Ken had not understood him. The money involved was the very last thing in Davy's mind, but he deliberately kept himself from feeling disappointment in his brother. He had been thinking with a kind of exaltation of the continuity of man's inventiveness — of how one man's mind could catch fire from another before him so that as far back as one could see there was a train of lights that extended deep into the night of the past. That thought had led to the possibility that this one small flame they were shielding now might in turn light fires into the future. Ken's reply shocked him and he decided to put the immediate matter as prosaically as possible.

He simply said, "It's this — when people talk about radio they're only thinking about the loud speaker at one end and the microphone

at the other. That's cockeyed. Suppose you look at it mostly from the point of view of the vacuum tube circuits in between? You know what you've got then?" He looked through the darkness at his brother. "You've got something like a part of the human brain with nerves and cells."

"It's only a radio set," Ken protested, reluctant, Davy knew, to be drawn outside the world where one could peer back through the lighted windows for new perspectives. Out there, ideas and accepted beliefs could be seen undressing themselves to nakedness, even to the hidden deformity that was the basic falsehood, but out there was a dark lonely place to be. "Why do you always want to make things so damn complicated, Davy?"

But Davy again lay still and thoughtful. He said slowly: "It's not complicated at all when you think of it. Up until radio, most inventions take the place of living muscles and do the job with more power. Except a few in electricity. Someday people will look back and say that radio was the first step completely away from machines of brute power. And if that's so, we'll be taking the second big step because our circuits are going to duplicate still another part of the central nervous system."

Ken was silent. Davy knew that he had made Ken uneasy.

"What I'm getting at is this," Davy said after a while. "In the long pull, whether we like it or not, we're going to be working for the duplication of one thing like that after another until finally there will be circuits that can remember and even learn—but faster, with more power and more accuracy than the human mind. That's what the vacuum tube has to lead to. If we don't do it, someone else will."

"Then let them. Let's keep our eyes on our own little ball."

"But our own little ball is bound to get bigger. If the use of power machines changed the whole world in less than a century with all kinds of wars and revolutions, then what's going to happen as a result of electronics? That's why I say let's take one more year—let's get to know as much as we can about the whole field before we start kicking over all the apple carts."

Ken smoked his cigarette for a long while, and the soft glow shone back on his face, delicate and thoughtful.

"Davy," he said finally, "I'll make a deal with you. All I'm interested in right now is what we were planning all along. There's money in it, and it shouldn't take more than a year or two. You want us to sign

up for a year of advanced work before we begin? OK. Only I'm trading you my help on your long-range stuff for your going through with the original plan. Now, don't give me any quick *yes*. This is too important."

"Sure, you get a quick *yes*," said Davy. He turned his head for the second time, but now his voice had lost its reflective quality. He was almost sounding a warning. "What if the short-range plan bumps head on into the long-range one?"

Ken crushed his cigarette ember in the tin-can top that was the ashtray. His reply when it came was almost curt.

"We'll take care of that if and when it comes." He turned over and pulled the blankets tightly about him. "Good night, kid."

"Night," Davy said, still staring at the ceiling because he knew very well that the trouble was bound to come; but then Ken had said that everything would turn out all right, and so, after a while, Davy believed it too.

So still another year was added to the four-year preparation for conquest. But that time passed as well, and in only one more day even that fifth year would be over.

To Davy, the separate hardships, sacrifices and victories formed a flight of stairs down which he had come, like the marble steps of the Engineering Building, which he now descended with the package for Norton Wallis.

Yet he was not leaving the place untouched.

This ugly building had been born in men's corruption and in many elusive ways the very morals of corruption lived on, so that young men could bribe each other to steal community property and not know there was any stigma to the act. They sealed their bargains with "Timberland," forgetting the origin of the word but following the example. Yet with this, an idealism was passed along, embodied in the pages of the books, in the very pictures on the walls—the high tradition of service: they were to be *engineers*, the caretakers of the physical world.

To the men in this building, the world's heroes were Fulton, Whitney, and Edison, who had developed the American tradition of invention of useful objects, while they more distantly admired the achievements of pure scientists like Newton, Faraday, and Einstein. The standards of the men to whom Davy felt closest were not lower than those of the pure scientists—there was only a difference in tem-

perament. Wallis always said that the underlying drive of the scientist was to know something useful that had never been known before — while what Davy was feeling was the drive of the inventive engineer to build something useful that had never been built before.

If Davy took for granted some payment in worldly goods, this was only a token, for he knew that no one could measure in coin the advantages that had accrued from the taming of wild steam as a prime mover, or the value of the victory over eternal night won by that minute and portable sun — the incandescent electric light. Here, in this building he felt at home in the world because here he had learned to be part of one of the world's great traditions.

The tradition was one of leadership and innovation — to make the physical world less hostile to the lives of men: to bring forth and maintain creations that changed the world, if not the men in the world. That each of these creations might become tools of further corruption indicated deep faults in the societies that received the gifts, but the gifts themselves were always seeds of liberation, and that was all any engineer could offer.

For all of Davy's voracious scientific reading, his knowledge of literature was limited to the fragments presented to him in the required year of English Lit.; and he had found only one figure who had meaning for him: Prometheus, the light-giver. To Davy, Norton Wallis was Prometheus as was every man whose work he admired. Even at twenty, he sensed that such a destiny was to be his own; but at twenty, the lonely rock and the ravening eagles seemed a lifetime away.

And so as he left Engineering Building on one of his last visits as a student, he was the embodiment of every tradition of his time and place — the very best and the worst. Davy questioned neither; and it would be many years before he would finally look up in tragic bewilderment to examine the road along which he had traveled, to decide, if it was not too late, exactly what was the ultimate objective to be sought over the horizon.

Right now, he knew only that he had fulfilled the first of two promises made to Norton Wallis. The second, and most important, still waited to be performed. But he never realized that he had forgotten to ask Wallis what his granddaughter looked like or what she would be wearing. There was no question in his mind that he would be able to recognize her instantly at the station even if she were to be surrounded by a thousand other girls dressed exactly like her. Ever

since he had learned weeks before that she might come, Davy had been carrying a picture of her in his heart without knowing why. Yet he was more completely a creature of logic than he knew; and out of sight of his conscious mind, hidden behind the mist of fantasy, he had recognized that if Norton Wallis was his king, this girl named Victoria must be the princess. And so he had selected her to be the one girl different from all others — the one girl whose smile, whose eagerness, whose interest in him would give reality to the vague dream with which he had always been in love. He was sure that he would recognize her by these qualities and by one other — for it was also necessary that she be different from any girl Ken had ever loved.

Chapter Two

When Vicky Wallis was ten years old, a slender, elfin child, her favorite hat was her wool tam-o'-shanter with the design of the Sinclair tartan. Her mother's name was Sinclair, and Vicky had been told in half earnestness that the Sinclairs were descended from the Earl of Orkney and Caithness, one of the Scots, wha' hae wi' Wallace bled. Wallace was about the same as Wallis; and Vicky thought it a stroke of fate that her father, obviously the descendant of a king himself, should marry the descendant of one of his great earls.

The idea, when it first occurred to her, was enormous; and since she had just come in from the November dusk, she shoved the itchy wool tam to the back of her head and stared at the possibilities of her royal heritage with wide, dark eyes. However, she kept the secret to herself, because the boys she played with were not given to romantic speculation. She would sit on the curb with them, adjusting her skates to her high-laced shoes, and then spend the rest of the smoke-scented autumn afternoon thundering along the sidewalks of Paramus Avenue, shouting, arguing and laughing with them until the blue cold air darkened to evening and time to go in; but all the while, beneath her tightly buttoned coat she knew she was clad in kilts, plaid, leather and mail: the terror of the Sassenachs.

Her mother kept her neatly dressed in ruffled frocks, bertha collars and high white cotton stockings, but when she darted off on an errand, she ran with the trim economy of a boy. She was the only girl her age on the 600 block of Paramus Avenue.

She had a thin oval face that flushed easily. Whenever some new kid came on the block, she fell quiet and her dark eyes took on a waiting quality, as if she expected some sudden challenge or derisive laughter. For, while her own friends seemed to have forgotten that she was a girl, she never did, and she knew that the newcomer was not fooled.

Because she was, in a sense, a stranger in a strange land, she was devoted to her friends even while she was inwardly resigned to their always imminent boy's disloyalty; and so, long before her time, she grew wise and learned in the lore of the treachery of the unthinking and the half friend.

Her tenth year, for her, marked only another birthday of the stable world of Paramus Avenue. For her father, though, it marked the end of an era. Vicky's father left the house every morning wearing a derby and carrying his briefcase: a slim, sandy-haired man of medium height, with a soft-spoken manner and pale blue eyes, but nobody ever jostled him or spoke to him in a tone any louder than his own because his eyes had a way of turning cold that was a wordless intimation of experience in silent violence.

Any son of Norton Wallis was a son without a father. On his own eleventh birthday, his mother left Wickersham with her two children for a permanent visit to her brother in Cleveland. Four years later, in 1890, Peter Wallis left Cleveland for the United States Navy. A proud service, he was told, and already in seventh place among the naval powers, being exceeded only by Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and Spain. He served on one of the last of the vessels of the Monitor class and then on one of the earliest destroyers.

He was clever, quiet and able — a well-brought-up boy; and so when in Trieste he stayed drunk longer than the rest of his liberty party and became technically chargeable with desertion, he went into panic. He was so terrified that, instead of returning, he took the advice and cash of a sympathetic Turkish gentleman and made his way to Istanbul, where he changed his name to Gordon and was given a Turkish commission equivalent to sublieutenant on a new German-built destroyer. Two years later, he was taken out of uniform and sent to Greece as an American businessman named Lane. After three successful years, the

police of Epirus found him out and made it clear that the only way he could stay in business — *any* business — was to transact some of it for them without, of course, letting his former employers into their secret. Peter Wallis kept his Turkish account satisfied for two more years, even though, as the Turkish government subsequently discovered, his merchandise was entirely misleading. It was a complicated life for a young American but he enjoyed the excitement, which was a continual tautness near the center of his stomach.

His Greek employers then had him forward intelligence that induced his Turkish principals to send him to the Italian ship-building center of Taranto. This was more complicated than before. One day an Italian colonel walked into his office and suggested that he reorganize once again to take on a third commission, for the Italian crown, and the pleasant tautness in Peter Wallis's stomach became a little too tight.

Spies, in all countries, are rarely brought to trial. They are either given the chance to switch sides or else accidents happen to them. Wallis now foresaw that he could only end up by working simultaneously for the twenty-odd possible employers in Europe, with all but one having grave cause for dissatisfaction.

He hid his panic and accepted the Italian colonel's offer; but when the officer got up to leave, he died. Wallis walked down to the quay where he got aboard the *Fiume*, leaving on the tide for Rio de Janeiro. In those days there were no passports, and the *Titanic* still had to create the wireless industry by proving that all ships at sea ought to rent one of Mr. Marconi's wireless sets. Wallis safely reached Rio at the age of thirty without a penny, without the right to use his own name and with not much more than an option on his life.

He decided to take the long chance of going home as if nothing had happened; the desertion charge was almost eight years old, a war had been fought, and the United States Navy had forged up to sixth place ahead of Spain. In 1905, then, Peter Wallis returned to Cleveland and went to work as a bookkeeper. Because of long experience with numbers from tabulating the decimal figures of gun bores, he progressed very rapidly. That same year he married Catherine Sinclair and moved to Milwaukee because no one could tell who might show up, and Germany at least was a country he had never visited.

Over the years, the knot in his stomach and the dryness of his throat disappeared; but when it became apparent that the country would enter the European War he saw that registration might start any number of old inquiries going. The desertion charge was almost twenty

years old, but he was afraid that more — far more — serious questions might be reopened.

For all his bland exterior, he was cursed with an imagination which, once seduced by panic, became a trollop for every fearful possibility. The old terror returned. He adored his quick little daughter with such devotion that his pale blue eyes would be filmed by tears to watch her at play. The idea of leaving his family for prison made him physically sick, and so he crossed the line into Canada to join the Black Watch, a special gesture whose meaning his wife understood.

Vicky was torn between misery and pride. For several weeks she and her mother were alone among the Schroeders, the Dieterles and the Wagners of Paramus Avenue. After a while, though, everyone was friends again; but by that time Vicky was spending more time with the girls of the Farman Avenue School.

She admired them wordlessly. They were all so much prettier than she that she was grateful to them just for letting her hang around. In her heart, though, she felt lost and skinny, and she began to edge back to the boys until she noticed with a slow and secret astonishment that she was daily being transformed into exactly what she wanted, as if some stranger had touched her tam-o'-shanter with a hidden wand as she walked past.

She returned to the girls, silently beseeching them to notice what was new about her, but to them she was still a girl with narrow square shoulders and the lithe walk of a boy. Nevertheless, she had a sudden passion for dolls and for neighbors' infants, plaguing her mother for a brother or sister when her father would come back from war; but her father died on Vimy Ridge and Vicky was sick with grief.

Because she was quick with her studies, she entered Steuben High a year younger than the rest of her class. There wasn't too much time for new friends, though. She had to hurry home after school to do her increased share of the household chores now that her mother, pale and sober-faced, had taken a job as saleslady. Even so, the boys began to pay attention to Vicky, but for reasons that she didn't understand.

When her mother reluctantly came to the decision that it was more practical for Vicky to transfer to Milwaukee Vocational and learn something useful, Vicky carried to the larger school this same innocent quality of stirring a certain type of boy to tormented doubts. The boys she attracted were not those who were on any of the teams, or the best dancers, but the ones who stood highest in the hardest subjects and made the most sense to talk to. At this particular point of her life, the

very last thing she wanted was sense, and she vaguely resented the boys who looked at her guiltily — as if she saw in them the inevitable future she was determined to evade. The world of Paramus Avenue had been smashed and she wasn't ready yet for the reality that lay beyond, so she searched for gayer worlds in which everybody was young and, like her, hated the gray violence beyond. She walked slim, erect and alone, dazzled by a dream that more properly belonged to someone else.

She was seventeen and already at work when her mother died in the influenza epidemic of 1923. Mrs. Schroeder next door sold the house for her, and wrote to the Cleveland Sinclairs and to the Wickersham Wallises. Norton Wallis answered first, and the lonely affection that poured out of his letters came just at a time when Vicky felt more empty than any book or movie hinted a person could feel. This love from a strange old man held the promise of a rebirth into a new world where all her losses could be forgotten, where her own shortcomings would no longer matter; for when she'd step off the train, she would be elegant, poised and, most of all, ravishingly beautiful.

2

Davy was clean and scrubbed as he waited at the station. The bright morning had been followed by a gusty rain that was just over. Beneath the yellow oilskin slicker that hung stiff from his shoulders, he wore a freshly ironed red and black checked cotton lumberjack shirt open at the neck, and a pair of wide-bottomed navy-blue trousers which were really sailor pants. He was bareheaded and, because of the ride down in the open car, his carefully combed hair was once more becoming tousled. His long face with high cheekbones was unusual only in its promise of what it might become, but because of his clothes he looked like any other student on the campus.

He looked like any other student on the campus, but here among the other men students waiting for the train, he was unique in the poverty of what he wore. This was the week end of the annual Last Dance held jointly by four of the most exclusive undergraduate fraternities, and at least forty young men dressed in their daytime best were crowded in groups along the platform waiting for the same train, some nervous, some determined, and some even bored at the prospect of the

arrival of their dates. They all wore slickers, however, and flasks were being surreptitiously passed.

The Milwaukee train arrived on time, streaked with slanting lines of rain. Crowds of girls gushed from the coach doors, their heads turning from side to side with anticipation. They came down like streams of flowers.

Davy stood helpless, watching the students and the girls meet in a colorful confusion from which couples walked away, the boy carrying the girl's bag, the girl chattering vivaciously or waving to some other girl being led off in another direction. Peering over everyone's head, Davy looked about for the one girl who would be lost, but as soon as he found her, she would suddenly smile with relief and go towards a boy who had been pushing his way towards her all the time.

The cluster of girls grew smaller and smaller like a chrysanthemum falling apart until only the lonely stem remained. Standing between two suitcases, as if each were a load manacled to an ankle, was the last girl — slim, erect and alone. She was wearing a green suit, her jacket casually folded over her arm along with a raincoat. In the other hand she slowly twirled a hat. She was a girl with very fair skin, short brown hair that stirred with the wind, an oval face, a slender nose and a dark, questioning glance. She was confused by the rush about her, but to Davy, the slight wistfulness she wore as a halo showed she was watching something in which she had never shared.

Then, either as if the imprisonment by her belongings were a mirage, or else as if this was a girl who could always free herself from any encumbrance, she stepped easily away from the suitcases. When she finally noticed Davy the wistfulness disappeared and she watched him approach with grave reserve.

"Are you Victoria Wallis?"

"Yes," she said slowly.

"I'm David Mallory. Your grandfather asked me to come down and pick you up. Are those bags yours?"

She looked up with quick concern, disturbingly alert for any evasion. "Isn't he well?"

"He's fine." Davy hesitated because he sensed a quality of penetration that would stare through anything to the truth. "It's just that he's busy in his workshop."

Her "Oh" was very low, and she looked away towards the waiting room as if still hoping to see a distinguished old gentleman rushing towards her with love and apologies in his outstretched arms. Ap-

parently she hadn't the vaguest idea of what her grandfather was really like, and the very quickness of her insight made her seem all the more vulnerable.

"That's how it is with his work," he explained. "It's not just a job."

She turned to look at him again. "Do you work for him?"

"No, I'm just finished up at the Engineering School. But we see him every day."

"We?" Her attention flashed on him and then as suddenly flicked away; she really didn't care. She was looking towards the waiting room again.

"My brother and sister and I. Your grandfather was awfully good to us when we were only kids just run away from a farm. Look, suppose we start. We'll drive past the campus. If that's all right with you."

"It's all right."

A small, slight, smartly dressed girl with vivid lipstick and dark, intense eyes hurried up and thrust a black case into Vicky's hand. Her staccato pace jangled with bracelets and beads, and her voice rushed. "Here, this must be yours. I took it by mistake. I'm *terribly* sorry." Then her small hand squeezed Vicky's wrist. "Listen, you were *wonderful*! Just what I needed. Don't worry about me. I'm fine now. He's *promised*."

"I'm glad," said Vicky quietly. She seemed sympathetic and gracious, but Davy saw the fleeting wistfulness, as if she were watching from the lonely darkness of a theater balcony a performance that suffused her with yearning even while she was half amused by insight through the sham. She said, "And thanks for the case. I would have missed it. Some of the things in there were my mother's."

The other girl's scarlet smile flashed once more. Then she jangled off on her high heels to the boy who had been waiting awkwardly some distance away.

Vicky looked after her, and again the sad distant longing shadowed her features, but now Davy felt he knew her very well. She had been instantaneously illuminated by the crazy searchlight glare of contrast with the other girl's tiny scorching femininity—caught and made transparent that way. Davy had seen deep into a wistful romanticism side by side with amusement at the stuff of dreams. He saw into her just as plainly as he saw her outwardly—a tall calm girl, with the slender unjeweled wrists and the light stance of a boy awaiting his turn with a fencing master.

"She sat next to me on the train and thought I was going to the

dance too," Vicky said, still watching the other girl. "She just took it for granted. She was afraid that this boy was going to get drunk. She didn't even like him, she said, but she couldn't bear to miss the dance. Is it really so wonderful?"

"I don't know. I've never been to one."

"No?" She glanced at him with quick curiosity. "Well, this girl thinks it is. Of course, when I told her that I wasn't coming here for the dance — that I'd never been to college at all, she remembered that she wanted a drink of water. But she didn't know about me until I told her. She couldn't tell," she added, as if still reliving the wonder of discovering that she had been in masquerade. "Well, she can't be very bright, anyhow," she said to Davy, and then laughed a little, not at the girl but at herself.

Then, before he could extend any understanding, she reached down for one of the bags, leaving the other for him; but even so her slender shoulders were set against the strain and suddenly she was delicately a girl. "Which way do we go?" she asked.

He strode beside her, watching her covertly. He regretted that he hadn't snatched up both bags just to show her that the weight she bore so bravely would mean nothing to him. She made him uneasy as she walked, as if there were sensitivity and pain hidden in the easy grace of her motion, the erect set of her curled head, the directness of her dark glance.

Davy sensed that she had seen through all boys at a time when their pride had been most transparent, and so she would always have that advantage over any man who recognized in her the tomboy by whom he had once been outrun or outfought — but the tomboy whom he had once hurt. He was walking so close to her that he brushed against her arm, but he had the hopeless feeling that she had already walked into his life and had gone straight through without a backward glance.

The Dodge roadster rebuilt from a hundred different wrecks stood by the curb, freshly painted and, from a distance, jaunty with its yellow wire wheels. But now he was bitterly aware of all its imperfections as he tied her valises to the baggage rack. He was almost angry with her. Her short curls shivered in the breeze, and her skirt whipped lazily against her body as she got in. He glanced away because she looked so pretty.

"Ah, well," he said acidly, and they started off. "A Cunningham's the car all right. Did you ever ride in one?"

"Is that what this is?"

He turned to stare at her. "Are you kidding me?"

"No," she said, surprised again that she should be suspected of indirectness. "I don't know anything about cars. I just think that this is an awfully nice one. Isn't it?"

"It's not," he said flatly. "Well, I suppose it's all right for here, although I guess this town must look awfully small compared to where you come from." He glanced at her again from the corners of his eyes. "You're not kidding about the car, are you?"

"No," she said quietly, but the price of her certainty was the withdrawal of her attention: as tangible to him as if she had withdrawn her hand from his.

He was driving along Arlington Avenue, to be seen with a strange girl in his car. Every time he shifted gears his arm brushed hers lightly. He didn't mean it to be deliberate, yet he knew it was. She didn't seem at all aware of him.

"Is it along here that they're going to hold that dance?" she asked.

"You really would like to go, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know. It's not the dance so much. It's the idea."

He shook his head. "I kept trying to figure what you'd be like," he said. "Sophisticated, or a business girl, or what. Ever since I knew you were coming."

She turned as if surprised. "You thought about me?"

"Well, why not?"

"I don't know why not," she confessed, now that she thought about it. "Was it something my grandfather said?"

"Does it have to be because of something somebody said?"

"But you didn't even know me."

"There were the letters."

She held her short shivering curls to her temples. "You read them?"

"Well, yes," he admitted. "He showed them to me — some of them, that is. Wasn't I supposed to see them?"

"It doesn't matter," she said slowly. "I wrote them for him, that's all. And his letters meant a lot to me. Did — did you read them too?"

"Oh, no!" He was glad to say it emphatically, because he saw that one would have to tell her every truth.

"They were wonderful letters," she went on, as if he had said nothing. "He seemed to know just what I wanted to hear."

"Well, I ought to tell you right now that he's a couple of people at the same time. One side doesn't need anybody or anything. The other side is lonely, I guess; the side that picked us up and made him write to you.

But you never know on which day which side is going to be on top."

"You mean today's the wrong day and that's the reason he didn't come to meet me?" she asked.

"Not really." Davy tried to soften the remark against her quick perception. "He *was* busy. Didn't you ever know an inventor?"

"No." She smiled at the absurd question. "Never. Is that what you are?"

"Me?" he demanded with false astonishment, but he was pleased. "What ever made you ask that?"

"The way you said it, I suppose."

"Maybe that's because I'd like it to be the truth," he confessed. "My brother and I always had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to be when we grew up. I don't know how it got started. Maybe from reading — we used to read everything we could lay our hands on. I remember that we found out there used to be glaciers down that far and then we discovered that there's an Ice Age every fifty thousand years . . ."

"There is?" This time she really looked at him.

"There's been one every fifty thousand years in the past, so I guess it'll keep on happening. It's due to the tilt of the earth's axis, and we decided that our first great invention was going to be a means of de-tilting the earth."

He was conscious of her wide-eyed regard, but whether she was awed by the two boys seriously planning to move the world, or whether she thought he was simply making fun of her, he couldn't tell.

"All right, it sounds funny," he said. "But we really thought about it. We even figured out how to raise the money by getting every country to pay a share. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, nothing. The next Ice Age is still on its way as far as anything we've done about it, because along about that time we picked up and ran away."

"From that farm?" From the way she looked at him, as if really seeing him now for the first time, he sensed that for her the idea of running away from home was as inconceivable as the coming of the next Ice Age. She hesitated for a moment, struggling against asking the direct question. But when she asked it, he knew she was not seeing him at all. "But what about your parents?"

"We didn't have any. We ran away from my uncle."

"But weren't you frightened?"

"Listen, we weren't leaving behind anything *good*."

"Perhaps not," she conceded. She looked away at the shops again. "Are you ever sorry?"

"Sorry?" he asked in astonishment. "Why should we be sorry? We're getting everything we ever wanted."

"You've been to college," she admitted.

"Oh, *that!* Was there something in particular *you* wanted to be?"

"No," she said thoughtfully. "It wasn't that so much. Oh, I suppose I had an idea that something special was going to happen to me . . ."

"Like what?" he urged. His voice was like a hand placed squarely on her shoulder, turning her around to face him, as if he were saying impatiently, *Look at me, will you?*

But she still would not admit him to her private reality.

"I don't know exactly what. I read a lot. Whoever I was reading about, that's who I was. Whatever happened to them, was happening to me." She glanced around again. "Are these the fraternity houses?"

"Yes," he said. He had started down Fraternity Row, driving very slowly so that he and she would appear deep in conversation. "But didn't you have any idea what you wanted to be?"

She shook her head. "I was anybody I wanted to be," she said after a while. "And it seemed to me that I was going to go on living at 654 Paramus Avenue exactly that way, playing all those games, reading all those books for the rest of my natural life. Wars never happened, nobody had ever heard about influenza epidemics and except in books parents never really died."

She had really dreamed of a golden-haired boy who would lead her to the edge of a circle where the boys and girls she most admired seemed banded together in a mysterious conspiracy. Their passwords were hummed snatches of songs and lines from jokes, their smiles were only for each other, and they had a cool disdain for the clumsy, less daring shufflers who were not in the know with them. Vicky had watched them with a yearning fascination. The boy she wanted would lead her into the very center of the magic circle. She glanced now at David Mallory sitting at the wheel next to her. The moment she saw him at the station, she had a fleeting recognition that he was so much the other kind of boy that she had almost wanted to run away from him before he could claim her. But she had stood her ground and escaped from him in another way. She screened him away from her sight — and herself from his — behind her cool impersonality that could become anger only if he should press her.

She looked about her at the old mansions, each with a Greek-lettered

shield or plaque. If she had ever cherished a fantasy of the kind of man she wanted, then this was exactly the street on which he would be living, but at this moment, riding down the main street of her dream, she was too deeply immersed in a nameless misery to care. It was as if Cinderella had left for the ball only to discover on her entrance that the fairy godmother had been a practical joker who had sent her on a long twisting drive that ended at her own back door.

They left the shabby mansions behind, went along a business street crowded with students, then along a drive lined with old willow trees. Now they were climbing a long hill with lawn on either side, and there the road ended. Even on an afternoon like this, there were couples on the grass, their yellow slickers making giant buttercups on the green.

"This is about as close as I can get to the Engineering Building," Davy said, stepping out. "I'll have to leave you here for a minute to see if a room has been set aside for the exam. Will you be all right?"

"I'll be fine," she said, smiling a little.

He leaned on the door next to her, and sympathy was in his deep eyes. "You'll get along, don't you worry. I've got to rush, but if it'll be any help at all, I promise to run up tonight for a little while. You *were* thinking about your grandfather, weren't you?"

"Partly," she said.

"Only partly?"

"That's all."

"Then what mostly?"

"Mostly?" she asked, and thought for a moment. "Mostly, I suppose, I was trying to think what it was that I once wanted to happen to me. In so many words."

Yet as impossible as it seemed for her to reduce the mist of her dreams to a gleaming pin-point drop of their compressed essence, it would have been easy for Davy. For then and there, as he stood with one foot on the running board, if she had looked down at the lake and let herself tell him everything — even in most roundabout elusive fashion — of the color and shifting shape of her vague yearnings, he would have listened, attempting to hide the pain behind his face as recognition grew, and then, when she had finished, he would have said very simply, "You mean my brother, Ken."

Ken's face was grave as he worked in the garage, wreathed in the sour blue smoke and roar of a truck motor under repair. The snoutlike hood of the big Mack was raised like the gaping maw of a dragon shouting to the somnolent wrecks nearby that there was no death for those who refused to die. High up in the cab of the truck, in the dragon's brain, Ken removed his foot from the gas. The clamor died to a bemused murmur, then an apologetic cough, and with Ken's foot on the gas again, rose into another platitudinous bray. But to Ken, as to any king's physician, the majestic roaring had only a clinical meaning — here an intake valve was stuck and, for the last ten minutes, he had been trying to force it into action.

Sitting there rigidly, so still, staring straight ahead, Ken had a look of dedication. His fair fine hair hung over his temples in two smooth wings that dropped to the corners of his eyes. Abruptly he tossed his head up and the hair flipped back into place making his face look clear, young, exalted. But this was only his attitude of attention with every sense but sight. His ears strained for the missed beat, his foot through the heavy-soled shoe was sensitive to the lag between fuel feed and power, his nostrils recognized raw unfired gas; and through the vibration of the truck, he was alert to the syncopated unevenness of a three-beat rhythm where there should have been four.

Because his understanding hands had held the different parts of the engine, the motor was an intimate friend who had come to him for advice and he would help it find itself. The rusty cylinder block was only an outer skin, and Ken saw through it to the cleanness of function within. To work with his hands, whether on a truck engine or on an elaborate research apparatus, that was what he understood and how he understood; and so engineering to Ken meant building. Let the theorists like Davy concern themselves with the theology and doctrine of science — all Ken cared about was what could be put into his two hands, for if it could be felt, it made sense. At work, there was blessedly no sense of competition, no compelling urge to prove for the thousandth time that he was the fleetest, the most agile, the strongest — or that he had to live up to every rash promise that flared from his tongue before judgment could lock his lips.

It was only with people that he became imprisoned by his own words,

and whenever this happened, he went through a bland-faced torment of hidden agony.

At such times, it was as if he were fleeing up the steps within a tall tower, pausing at each landing only to slam and lock the successive doors shut against his pursuers so that by the time he reached the top, he found himself trapped. There was never anything left but to continue his frenzied flight across the top room of the tower to the balcony outside; there to shout out his defiance and then leap into space, never knowing in the seconds of free fall whether he was going to land on a haystack or a pile of boulders.

However, there was always the reward for the agony suffered. When he finally came to the surface of the pond after having stayed under water longer than any other boy, there was the admiration in the eyes of the others that was the anodyne to a bursting heart. When he took up the baseball in his leaden arm to drag himself through his Christy windup, he could feel the dependence on himself by Davy and the other fellows out in the field behind him. He was the one they were counting on to perform the miracle; and for that warmth and confidence he loved them all to the extent that he'd die for them.

The ball games had been rare, the swimming had been rare, for there was always work for farm boys, but in everything Davy was always on the team — Davy *was* his team. Just as much as Davy wanted it that way, Ken too had to know that the kid was safe somewhere behind him, urging him on, shouting reminders of all the previous wonders performed. "*Come on, Ken!*" . . . and Ken would swallow a little easier because of that penetrating call of sheer faith.

Any man who was as generally liked as Ken had to like people, but he never really understood why he was liked; he merely took it for granted. Every so often, though, he would feel overwhelmed by a smothering demand from someone who mistook his affability for proffered affection — a new girl bound to make herself a nuisance, a fellow offering himself as a friend to someone who already had a friend, for Ken really needed no one but Margot and Davy. The others he required only for fun, and he was the one to decide when the fun was over.

When he felt pressed this way, he had only to lose himself in the impersonal coolness of work that he loved — by submerging himself down in the cool depths where there was peace. But the time would arrive when he'd become restless and he'd drop his tools to stride out towards the shore, wiping the water from his eyes, smiling expectantly at the boys and girls on the beach, trying to determine who was calling him

with the loudest, gladdest cries because whoever wanted him the most could have him — for the time being.

Through his body he felt the engine subtly change its rhythm, and he relaxed as the fourth cylinder came into play. He was about to turn off the ignition when Davy drove into the garage. Davy always drove fast when he was alone, and the runabout shot off the cobbled street in a smooth tight arc, passing neatly through the open doors. The low car rolled to a halt a few feet from the truck.

Without turning his head, Ken said, "What's she like?"

"Who?"

Ken glanced down at his brother, examining him for a moment. "The Wallis girl."

"Oh, she's OK," Davy said casually.

Ken looked away again, returning his attention to the work. "Is she good-looking?"

"She's just a kid, Ken. Listen, how much more do you have to do? Do you think you'll be finished tonight?"

"Tonight, hell! I'm finished now." Ken snapped off the ignition and climbed down with an easy grace. "I did the Buick, Anderson's Hudson and this."

"You couldn't have!"

"But I did," Ken insisted, laughing. "As a matter of fact, I made a date with Alice for tonight."

"Alice? I thought that was all washed up. And what about the finals tomorrow?"

"What about them? If we don't know enough to pass right now, we never will. You weren't planning to study."

"I certainly was."

"You said you were going to be working on that radio stuff until about ten-thirty."

"Only because I figured you'd be on the engines until then."

"Then what's the difference? I'll leave Alice early and be back by then."

"Who are you kidding? Christ, Ken, you take the stupidest chances. You know that a hell of a lot more than just the degree depends on that exam. Where do you think you've got the time to go out on a date?"

"I may not have the time but what am I going to do about the energy? All morning long I was wearing out my pants in the library."

Incidentally, I've dug up a new derivation of Poynting's Theorem. As for Alice, it's *your* fault I'm seeing her tonight. You weren't here to answer the phone."

"Don't give me that. Every time you drop one of your girls, she calls me to try to get back to you. You keep *your* girls and I'll take care of my own. Call her and tell her you're going to be busy."

"No," said Ken stubbornly. "What for? The finals? They're going to be a breeze. Here's a couple of presents I swiped for you." From his pocket he took two silvered glass bulbs and handed them to Davy. "Screen grid tubes. One to work with and one to take apart. They're cute as hell. I was taking characteristics this afternoon."

Davy looked down at the shining vacuum tubes, enjoying the round silky smoothness as the glass warmed to his palm. "Oh hell, do as you please. Only I think that tonight of all nights . . ."

Ken grasped Davy's arm with a jocularly that was half masked annoyance.

"Listen," he said, looking up into Davy's face. "Am I your older brother?"

"Well?"

"And the older brother is supposed to set an example?"

"If you call . . ."

"The older brother *is* supposed to set an example," Ken said firmly. "And what were your last words before going down to meet that Wallis girl?"

"I said . . ."

"You said, 'Be back in twenty minutes.' Twenty minutes. You were gone two hours."

"Well . . ."

"*Two* hours. Did I make a stink? Did I say where the hell were you? Did I say a word about the exams tomorrow? One word? I preserved what is known as a decent restraint about *your* affairs. All I asked is was she pretty. As your older brother, that's the example I set. Now go and do likewise about *my* affairs. And another thing, I'm wearing those pants tonight so take them off and hang them up for a while. Now beat it."

"You go to hell," said Davy, but he was smiling in spite of himself.

Ken's careless assurance that everything was going to be all right lost its meaning as soon as he drove away after supper. Davy listened to the motor die in the distance, then Ken was gone, and Davy was all alone with an apprehension which only loyalty kept him from recognizing as pure resentment.

Margot had been detained at the store and so she hadn't come home for supper. *She* never would have let Ken go off like that. Hell, thought Davy, she knew what these exams meant. Next week they were going to start raising the money to finance the work, and Davy's plan all along had been to go to the bank for backing. With their examinations safely passed, they wouldn't be just a couple of local kids from a garage with a crackpot idea, but two university-trained engineers with advanced degrees to prove they knew what they were talking about. In that light, passing tomorrow's examination meant money, the kind of cash on which their entire future depended. For Ken to tear off after a girl wasn't even a gambler's gesture. As far as Davy could see, there was nothing to gain that could possibly compensate for what might be lost. A gambler, at least, stopped to calculate the odds against him.

Damn it, Davy thought explosively, *I am* sore at Ken! He shouldn't have gone out. And the chances were that he'd stay out until God knew when.

The confession was a relief in a way, for then Davy could turn the anger on himself for never lashing out at Ken the way Margot did. Ken didn't need that kind of protection. When he was right, he was right; but by God when he was wrong, he could be as wrong as hell and he had to be told. Davy resolved to stay up and go through the review with Ken no matter when he came in, even if it meant working all night long.

He started for his notes, but the two new tubes Ken had brought seemed to gleam up at him. He pulled open the drawer, and the twin small globes made a light clinking sound. He picked up and examined one of the delicate spherical shells, merely as an excuse to be touching the glass; while within him he lazily fought the impulse that always urged him to break the glass so that he could see — actually *see* its heart and appreciate the ingenuity of the construction. There was no sense of

vandalism, but rather the temptation to enter into another world where he was completely at home through his imagination.

The glass tinkled sharply on the table edge, and he carefully brushed away the shattered pieces. He examined the spidery finger of wire and metal, turning the support slowly again and again. Then he took the other tube and stuck it into the empty socket of a test circuit.

Like a silver ball on a Christmas tree, the spherical radio tube gleamed dully in the half darkness. A faint star floated on its glass surface—the reflection of the lone working light a few feet away. Davy sat beneath the light, facing away from the tube, but he saw into its heart through the meters before him, and his fingers, sensitive to the control knobs on the panels, probed delicately into a tiny universe whose atmosphere was as rarefied as interstellar space.

He pressed a small switch and the silver sphere shone with a cherry glow: in its exact center a short straight thread of wire became hot with current. But Davy, through his understanding, was aware of very much more. From the incandescent surface of the fragile wire, he saw a fine invisible spray of electrons stream out to form a minute electrical mist. The tiny fog grew denser and heavier about the filament because the cloud was enclosed by an electrical wall. To the electrons the wall was impassably solid, although a human eye would have seen only a small cylinder of thin metal gauze. This grid acted like a miniature dam with electrical spillways that opened and shut, releasing gusts of electrons one million times a second, so that the steady current which had first entered the filament now pulsed at the same rate that the spillways had opened and shut.

That brief transforming passage through a grid was all that ever happened in any vacuum tube. Yet to Davy it was as if in one continuous operation molten steel had splashed from a furnace into an ingot and then passed under the multi-ton pressure of a stamper, through the steaming teeth of a miller, to be dressed, shaped and notched, and finally rammed home into a lathe chuck for finishing. What all these massive machines did to metal, one small vacuum tube did to electricity; and it was Davy's conception that by the tube's mere existence, raw electricity had taken on the malleable character of a medium for man's endless creativity. From the first moment Davy had understood the tube's function, he had been caught and lifted by its possibilities in the same way that a man who had been haunted for years by the harmonies and piercing evanescent beauty of the world's sounds had finally discovered that there was such a thing as music.

He felt a wordless love for the subtle power that was under his control—a warmth and dedication that made even the most routine work an experience that took him completely out of all awareness of himself.

He was so engrossed that the knock on the door had to be repeated twice before he heard.

Vicky stood bareheaded in the doorway, her hands deep in her pockets, her shoulders set and square. He could see her looking at him with dark wistfulness to be sure he was really the same person she had seen that afternoon. But he had the sense of there being still more to her expression. At the moment, the meaning was beyond reach, but he was haunted by it.

“You must have forgotten that you said you were coming over,” she said.

He opened his mouth in profound dismay because he actually had forgotten; but far worse, he suddenly realized, was that when he had made the promise he had also forgotten about tomorrow. Yet all evening long, he had been berating Ken for doing exactly what he himself had done.

“Come on in,” he said apologetically. “I must have been crazy. I’m awfully sorry. Tomorrow’s our big exam.”

She still hesitated; and for that one instant that she withheld herself, he wanted to reach out, to touch her, to take her by the arm. The hesitancy gave her a poignant defenselessness he hadn’t seen in her before and again he wondered what was still eluding him.

“If you’re studying—” she began.

“Oh, come on in,” he said again. “I’m only testing a new tube.”

“Just for a minute then,” she said. She lowered her eyes because she had to pass very close to him in the narrow doorway. He continued to stand there, sensing the slight stir of her passage, and he watched her cross to the worktable. Because she was in the garage, he saw for the first time the extreme ugliness of the place.

“It’ll take me a second to finish up,” he said, “and then I’ll be right with you.”

She seated herself on a high stool near the table, watching him; but in another moment he was lost to her, because he was once again in the circuit. To Davy, every circuit that he designed was a new universe he himself had created, and for the time that he used it, he lived in it—even this simple circuit now under test.

Vicky, in her silence, saw a harsh-featured young man staring with

darkly distant eyes at a silvered glass bulb surrounded by a jumble of wire and metal plates, but he was seeing a world as it appeared to the electrons under his control — a star-studded darkness through which they would race along an electrical path that was always downward. Sometimes the fall became a chaotic swirl, sometimes a great slow eddy whose wide-swinging arcs flowed inexorably to the center of a vortex where the downward plunge continued as before. Only when the wires led the electrons back to the batteries were the electrons projected upwards again, so that in the still silent liquid of a storage cell, he saw a soaring cascade to electrical heights as if a waterfall of stars had been reversed. All irregularities in the current were erased, and it flowed smoothly back to the vacuum tube ready to be marked by the grid with some new pattern of pulsation.

The pulsations, though, had come through the air from a thousand miles away, and a wire in the sky had caught them for the grid. The circuit through which the current surged included a set of earphones clamped to Davy's head so that he heard the strains of *Traviata* rasping in his ear. The music meant nothing to him except as the swirling surface of a torrent of falling stars along a course he himself had created and shaped with simple pieces of wire.

Yet all the while, the girl's haunting face had been in the back of his mind, and suddenly the electrical world of cold beauty and inhuman perfection faded into the world of the garage that was warm with life because he finally realized how numbing had been the disappointment he had seen in the doorway. He leaned back and turned off the switch.

"Well, how did it go?" he asked softly.

She reached down to the shattered tube and touched it.

"You mean at my grandfather's house?"

"Yes."

"We both felt a little strange, that's all." Very gently, she picked up the broken glass; then she raised her eyes abruptly, asking for his candor, as if promising that never again would she ask so great a favor. "Did he really expect me?"

"What do you mean?"

"He didn't even have a room ready for me. He said that he had forgotten; but if he could forget —"

"Does he know you're down here?"

"I guess he knows. After supper he just said he had some work. I didn't know what to do, so I waited out on the porch for you. Then I went back to the workshop to ask the way here and he didn't even ask

why I wanted to know." Her voice went flat. "He just gave me directions."

She glanced about her for a moment as if she couldn't imagine how in the world her life had brought her to just this place. He watched her hopelessly.

"But as you said yourself," he hurried to say, "everything will turn out all right."

"Oh, I said it. The thing is do I believe it."

"You *do!*" he insisted. "And it *will* work out. I'll walk you up the hill. We can sit on the porch awhile. I can take off the few minutes."

"No," she said quickly. "I don't want to go back yet."

"Don't you like the place?"

"No," she said gently, as if she had only pity for the appalling inadequacy of his question. "It's all too different from what I hoped it would be. I don't even know how to tell you what I did want."

"Some kind of family, of course."

"Well, of course!" Her dark eyes looked up with defiance. She made him think of a boy challenging a man to fight. "What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing's wrong. But look, nothing ever pans out exactly the way you expect it to. You're not the way I expected you to be either."

She should have said, *What did you expect?* but she didn't answer. He saw that whenever he came remotely near talking about what he thought of her, she lost interest and wandered off into a voiceless void where not even his shout could reach her.

Vicky was shaking her head. "I'll probably be leaving in the morning. As much as anything, I suppose, I came to tell you good-by."

"You're lying —" he blurted out — "you just this minute thought of it!"

She laughed a little. "I didn't know it on the way down, but I do now." She held out her hand. "You were really very nice to me. I can get up the hill by myself."

He refused to see her hand, as if that denial could make her stay a little longer. He thought momentarily of putting aside all his preparations for the examination tomorrow in order to spend the entire night if necessary walking with her along the deserted streets, talking to her to force his voice across the dark chasm of her disinterest; yet he had no other argument than that it was simply he who wanted her here.

The door opened and Ken strode in, seeing them only when he was

halfway across the floor. He stopped, glanced at Vicky and then at Davy. His eyes were so clear that he seemed to have starlight still glowing in his pupils. He looked at Vicky once more — carefully this time — and then he finally presented his question with a slight smile of curiosity.

"Well, hello!" he said slowly, with a rising inflection.

"Gosh, I'm glad you came, Ken. This is Victoria Wallis —"

"Oh? How are you?" He glanced at the girl again, but then he turned to Davy, smiling. "You didn't expect to see me for hours, did you?"

"No," said Davy. "I didn't."

"I know damn well you didn't. I was that mean, inconsiderate, no-good so-and-so who ran off leaving you hold the bag." Ken laughed. "But I'm forty minutes early as it is." He rubbed his hands together with mock impatience. "Well, where are all those books and papers? Margot home yet?"

"No."

Ken frowned. "Who's she out with?"

"Some girl from the store."

"Sure it's a girl?"

"How do I know? Listen, Ken, I want you to tell Victoria here about the old man — the way he can get so wound up in his work that he doesn't seem to be paying any attention to anything else."

"Please —" Vicky said.

"You should have warned her, kid," Ken said to Davy. "You should have gone in with her." Ken turned to Vicky. "I can imagine how it must have seemed to you, but you'd really be foolish to let your grandfather's attitude bother you." He smiled a bit. "A girl like you — you'll have a marvelous time up here. You know that, don't you?"

Instead of being annoyed by the glibness of the compliment, as Davy half expected, she laughed, but she sounded rueful and, to Davy's further surprise, shy. "I'm afraid that I don't know it."

"You're crazy." Ken's dismissal was careless. "The fellows will fall all over themselves for you. Take Davy — the boy who was going to be so busy studying!" He returned his gaze to his brother. "Well, what about it? Are you ready to start?"

"Any time you say."

"Then I'd better go," Vicky said. "I was only going to stay for a minute."

"And don't worry about a thing," Ken told her, holding the door.

Davy lingered for a moment, but did not stand aside to let her pass: she would be going away so empty-handed.

"I'm going to show her the way up," Davy said. "I'll be back in a minute."

"You don't have to." Vicky had already gone out past Ken. In the half darkness, her face was delicately shadowed.

"But I want to," Davy insisted. "How long will it take, anyhow?"

Vicky turned from one to the other, as if within the past few minutes Ken's permission had become something to wait for.

"OK," said Ken, shrugging as he turned away. "Don't be long though."

Through the cool moonlight, Davy and Vicky went up the hard-packed twisting path. Halfway to the top, neither had spoken.

"If Ken hadn't had so much on his mind," Davy said apologetically, "he would have taken more of an interest."

"Is he very much older than you?"

"Only a year and a half."

"He seems more."

Davy turned to her abruptly. "You really won't leave, will you?"

She didn't answer.

"Will you?" he insisted. "Victoria?"

She continued to walk beside him, almost brushing his arm with hers, and then impulsively, as if his body had a will for action beyond his control, he put his hands on her shoulders and turned her around. In the moonlight her mouth looked softly young and surprised. His hands dropped to his sides, remembering her body beneath the fabric of her clothes.

"At least until after our exams," he persisted. "Then Ken, Margot and I —"

"All right," she said, but she seemed embarrassed now. "After all, it *really* was only the first day. I'll leave you here. I can find my own way up. And good luck on your exams. And don't call me Victoria — it's Vicky."

He turned and started down the path, and he knew that she was looking after him. He had gone about ten yards when he heard her voice call out to him, "And tell your brother I wish him luck too."

He glanced about abruptly, but she had already started off in the other direction so that it was now Davy's turn to stand all alone in the empty darkness and gaze after a retreating back.

On the morning of the examination, Margot lit the stove as soon as she awoke, so that when she was dressed and ready to leave for the office the comfortable roar of blazing wood filled the sunlit kitchen. On impulse, she had dressed very carefully, from the new silky underwear to the new gray dress that had made the salesgirl exclaim that she looked real chic!

Today she could have burst with the frustrated desire to be of some positive help to Ken and Davy. Years had passed since she had shared their work; and while she had no feeling of resentment at being left behind, still, on days as crucial as this, she was tormented by her inability to give them active assistance. There must be something she could do that was more important than simply making breakfast for them.

Finally, her high heels clicked across the scrubbed worn oilcloth to the boys' room. She opened it without knocking, and looked down at her younger brothers asleep on their bunks on opposite sides of the narrow whitewashed room. She wondered whether the day would ever come when she could think of them as grown men. To her they were still the boys they had been on the farm, half wild, unaware that there was anything wrong with the way they were living or even that there was any other way to live except to be away from Uncle George.

They had obeyed her only because they loved her, but it was this love from both boys that gave her the support she had needed. Nothing less than love would have satisfied her because half her love for them at the time was resentment. If she were alone in the world, she could have come and gone as she pleased. If she were alone, then she would once again be the little girl wearing a white silk pongee coat, white stockings and shoes and a white straw sailor hat with black streamers. That was her most luxurious memory of herself — a small girl in lovely clothes sitting happily in the green plush of a Pullman compartment.

It was from that too that she had the clearest picture of her parents. Her father had been a tall man with a black mustache and pink cheeks, very regular teeth and a smile so full of love for her that she never needed any words from him to prove it. She remembered fingering the smooth little dog's head that was the handle to his cane as he explained that from this day on she would have new dresses, a pony cart, dolls, anything at all, because he was a man now who had made something

of himself. Yes sir, he was the man who from now on was going to be selling this whole railroad the very green plush she was sitting on. And her mother had smiled too, her darling, sweet-smelling, beautiful mother in a shiny green dress with rows of glistening black buttons down the front.

If Margot had a goal in life, it was a return to the love and protectiveness, to the achingly sweet anticipation of all the wonderful things to come that were embodied in that one memory. Sooner or later, she was fiercely sure, she would find herself on another train — in the very same atmosphere of love and comfort. And that unforgotten trip — delayed all these years — would continue on to its destiny.

Part of her secret resentment then had been that her brothers didn't even understand what she told them of a life so different from what they knew. They had thought she was just making up stories. But she had carried them along, firing them with her own ambition and her father's — to make something of themselves. They had done everything she asked because they loved her; and for that love alone, they in turn were eligible for that long journey back to the Pullman compartment because they had given her the first of the three prerequisites of love, fortune and a future. By this time, the smiling parents and the happy little girl in the Pullman had merged quite easily into the beautiful woman and her two handsome successful brothers.

The young boys had become young men, and on this morning of their final examinations, which would in reality mark merely the beginning of that long-planned journey, they slept beneath her gaze, and for a moment she watched them with pride, tenderness and absolute confidence.

"Come on, you two, wake up," she said. "Come and get it. I've got to be on my way."

Ken awoke at once and, as he raised himself to his elbow, she felt the appraisal with which he always examined her. She sat down on the edge of his bunk, lightly touched the roughness of his unshaven cheek and smiled as she asked, "Anybody nervous in here?"

"Nobody but just us chickens," Ken said. He moved his face against her hand. She loved the love in his eyes, but she could see behind it that Ken had spent a troubled night. He always worried about examinations at the very last minute although he'd never admit it. "What time is it?"

"Time to get up," she said. Davy was staring up at the ceiling with his naked arms behind his head.

"Did you know our young friend was entertaining women last night?" Ken asked Margot. "And just before an exam, too!"

"The Wallis girl?" Margot asked. "What's she like?"

Davy said nothing, still staring at the ceiling, but he was alert.

"Pretty nice," said Ken, thinking the question had been directed at him. "You know. But not my type, I don't think."

"And maybe you're not her type either," Davy said. He rolled over finally, and surveyed his sister. He too needed shaving, but his beard made him look younger than usual. "You look pretty fancy," he remarked.

"I'm dressed for luck," she said.

Davy's smile broke suddenly with understanding. "We'll need it."

"The hell we will," Ken said. He winked confidentially at Margot as she rose. "It'll be a breeze, men, a breeze!"

She smiled down at him and shook her head. "You always say that. Davy, keep your eye on the big boob."

"A breeze," Ken insisted.

Davy's dark face looked up at her from his pillow. His eyes were humorous and intelligent. She always waited on Ken first, spoke to him first, touched him first, thought about him more and probably loved him better; but she and Davy always understood each other more intimately and with less words.

"You go along," Davy said. "And don't worry."

The June morning was brilliant — green, soft blue and shadow black, all the colors sharply defined and yet liquid. The still air had a mild astringency tempered with the rising heat and moisture from the dew-spangled fields. Even the small nondescript houses had a softened appearance as if this were exactly the sort of day for which their shabby beauty was intended. Overnight a new circus poster had been put up across the street, its garish color offering final proof that summer was here.

Margot let herself out of the side door, closed and locked it, and then went out towards the street for the trolley stop. No one else was there. But as she stepped off the curb, a gleaming parked car started towards her as if it had been waiting just for her appearance. She watched it for a moment or two as it bore down on her. Then, when she recognized it, a small smile touched her eyes and she turned away in apparent unconcern.

The automobile stopped directly in front of her, and Vollrath

leaned across the front seat to open the door. He looked very sure of himself, solid, and yet there was a subdued recklessness about him.

"Why not stop fooling around," he said. "Come on, get in. Today I represent the Wickersham Traction and Corruption Trust. None of the trolleys are running today and so the company has sent out private cars for the passengers."

"Thanks," she said, "but I'll wait."

"If you don't ride with me, I'll lose my job. And I have my widow and orphans to support. You wouldn't be hard on defenseless creatures, would you?"

She laughed softly. After all, she'd held out long enough. "No," she said, "I wouldn't do that."

She got in and sat down next to him, surprised at the utter luxury of the appointments, so surprised and pleased that she turned to him, about to exclaim.

They skimmed along with an ease absolutely new to her.

"My name is Vollrath — Douglas Vollrath," he said.

"Yes, I know," she said quietly. "Mine is Margot Mallory. I live in the back of the garage with my two brothers."

He laughed again. "All right. All right. You mean we don't have to begin at the beginning. Do we agree that it's a fine day?"

"Yes," she said. She liked his easy manner and voice. "I'll agree that it's a nice day."

She relaxed still further in the luxury of the seat and something told her that he found the slight movement charming. She had the pervadingly delightful sensation of knowing that in his eyes at that moment she was beautiful and so she felt beautiful.

"I still can't believe you really got in the car," he said. "What happened? Is it because the circus is coming to town or is today something special?"

"Very special and bigger than the circus. The boys are taking their finals today. It's a day we've all waited for so long, it hurts to look back. But today's the day, and they'll be all right. I know they will."

"I was hoping it would have something to do with me."

"Oh no. It hasn't anything at all to do with you. You just happened along. I'll tell you what, though," she said as an amused concession because he actually seemed disappointed. "It *is* a special day for me, and you *did* just happen along, but if you really want, you can be part of it too."

"Thanks." He made it sound idle, but that he had to descend to the

level of pretense amused her secretly even more. Whatever else he might be, in this one part of himself, he was painfully young, vulnerable and — she remembered warily — violent.

The wind poured around the glass windshield without touching her, and she found herself pretending that this was a ride that would have no end, that the car would speed right through the town, and out the other side onto a highway that would lead to a shining spired city.

With a vague sense of dismay as if too late she had caught herself in infidelity, she realized that she thought this a better way than Pullman to travel to the cities of beauty that she felt were her destination. She turned at once to Vollrath, a man who must have lived all his life in such cities, and saw that he was the best-dressed man she had ever known. Another thought occurred to her — if she were to leave Wickersham for good today, this was just the dress she would have selected. She turned again to Vollrath and it was as if he had pulled her to him and kissed her with such sweet force that she was helpless against the flood of her own suddenly awakened desire. She looked down at her hands, and for the rest of the ride she was a little flushed, a little breathless and submissively thoughtful.

6

Up until the very last moment, Ken had secretly hoped there would be no examination at all. There was so much at stake for these next few hours that he couldn't stand thinking of it — he didn't know if he could bear a failure.

The examination was to be held in Professor Beasely's office, and as Ken led Davy into the room he felt a lurch of disappointment at the sight of the two neat piles of paper on Beasely's desk. It was a good thing he had not confided his dream to Davy, because the kid would have had that dark, half-amused way of looking at him — full of affection, understanding, that somehow or other always put Ken on the defensive. However, Ken still felt that if it hadn't been for Beasely, there was a good chance that there *might* have been an exemption.

Beasely was thirty-six, the youngest professor in the department of electrical engineering. He sat at his desk, a thin, squeezed, black-haired man who seemed driven by a desire to compress himself still further to avoid any contact with anything outside himself.

Davy always said that the only way to explain him was that he must

see himself as a man of poise, flashing intelligence and aloof charm. His colleagues and students saw him as prim, vain and childishy petulant. Yet within his specialized field, which was power transmission, he was more than able. The arms of steel towers bore high-tension electricity across the continent on Beasely insulators. He was proud that he had been an early success. The work that the Mallorys had been doing this past year had aroused in him the suspicion that they might make a mark at an even earlier age, and he seemed to resent it as if his own accomplishment would thereby be lessened.

He looked up from the desk at them for a silent moment, willing his thin hostility into them.

"I took it upon myself to go over the heads of the examining committee," he said in his rapid, icily precise voice. "The first section of ten questions is the original form submitted by the committee. The second section, my own addition, has only one problem but it calls for wholly original thinking. You two fellows have managed one way or another to get yourselves some outstanding reputations around this school. I still remain to be convinced. It's nine-thirty now. You will have until five. It would be an insult to remind you, of course, that you are on your honor."

He rose abruptly and strode out of the room, his head high as if expecting them to gaze after him with soft wonder and admiration in their murmured, "There's a man I'd die to serve!"

"That son of a bitch!" Davy said.

Ken glanced at the door, saying nothing. The blatancy of Beasely's dislike unnerved him, and beneath his own anger, he was secretly afraid of the man in the way anyone feels helpless before an adversary who is armored against one's only weapons. He had the sickening sense of being already marked for failure, but he removed his tie and his jacket, deliberately rolled up his sleeves, and then lit a cigarette before he even glanced at the question sheet. He just hoped that Beasely could have seen him. In his defiance, he read no further than the first question of the first section and then began to write rapidly. Davy watched him from the desk, smiling slightly.

"When are you going to read the question that's Beasely's joker?"

"When I get up to it."

Davy was gentle. "I'll know by your scream."

Ken glanced up, smiling his secret concern. "That bad?"

Davy nodded, but he too had started on the first question. "Murder," he said.

Because of their preparation, they both went steadily through the first part of the examination, although anxiety was a persistent heaviness around Ken's heart. He glanced up at his younger brother and wondered whether Davy was feeling the hope that eluded him. But Davy was leaning over his paper, his face set and preoccupied, with only the slightest tautness around his mouth to show strain.

Davy's apparent calm increased Ken's despair as he sat there. Did Davy have those awful moments of empty unworthiness that came to Ken with the realization that they were only self-taught? Did Davy too sometimes wonder if he truly *understood* all these concepts, these equations, or was this all only more parroting as that long tortured year of preparation had been? Ken doubted it. Davy knew. Davy understood. Davy was sure.

It was only at shaken moments like this that Ken realized how little he knew of what went on in Davy's mind. Usually he just took Davy for granted as another face of his own head, as another part of his own mind, as another pair of hands on his own arms, but now that Ken was entirely on his own, faced only with himself and his own ability, he wondered uncomfortably just who he really was — who and how much. He shook the conjecture away and went back to work.

The warm June morning passed swiftly and the office air slowly turned blue with cigarette smoke. They spoke to each other only to request matches, the big slide rule and the various tables of functions and integrals which were permitted for examination use. Around two o'clock, both finished the first section and, while eating the sandwiches Margot had prepared, they read over Beasley's addition: only one question, but it was a problem in classical electromagnetic theory that had never come into the scope of their work.

"My God!" said Ken. "The committee will never let him get away with that!"

"Do you want to take the chance?" Davy asked. "We're his candidates and that gives him the right to do what he damned pleases. Take it easy, Ken, you'll work it out."

They both stared at the typewritten question for a long time, silently formulating their own thoughts. They paced the floor, each absently careful not to trespass on the other's line of parade. Davy was the first to sit down and begin to write. Ken watched his younger brother longingly because Davy had always been so much stronger on theory than he, but then Ken too sat down and began to compose an answer, breathing with measured care. If only he had good warm tools in his hands

instead of a pen, with what ease he'd build an answer! This way he was crippled — absolutely crippled.

For over two hours, they each worked steadily, sometimes scratching out whole pages to correct an error, but when Ken finally threw down his pen and massaged the cramp out of his wrist, he looked up to find Davy watching him with depthless eyes and an expression of hard purpose.

Ken's smile was forlorn. "I think I blew it."

Davy's dark-blue gaze moved over his face for a moment.

"Let me see your paper," Davy said. He sounded thoughtful.

Ken hesitated, glancing at the door in the stillness. He made no move.

"Didn't *you* make any headway?" he asked.

"I finished, all right. Hand me your paper, Ken. I want to be sure that neither of us did anything foolish."

"The most foolish thing we could do is get caught by Beasely. He'd ruin us, kid. For Christ's sake, next week we start work on our own, and it's up to me to go to the bank to raise the dough. We can't take a chance on having that son of a bitch take the degree away from us!"

"That's just my point, so hand it over." Davy's command was quiet. He reached out and took Ken's paper from his moist fingers. At the same time he slid his own over to Ken, who picked it up gingerly. Ken's heart was pounding but he was wildly avid for confirmation of his work.

As usual, Davy had attacked the problem from pure theory. Ken envied the way mathematics had been used to build an avenue of logic from first principles to the desired result. On the other hand, Ken had treated the problem by inventing an experiment whose outcome he predicted. His eyes moved nervously from the door to the paper in his hand to Davy's face that never wavered in its attention to the paper before him.

"Well?" Ken demanded when he could stand it no longer.

Davy absently handed back the booklet and retrieved his own. "I don't know," he said. "I just don't know. We've both done it so differently. There's only one thing left to do."

With a lithe motion, he walked swiftly over to Beasely's bookcase and ran his fingers across the titles.

Ken stood up, shaking. "Cut it out!" he whispered. "He's liable to come in any minute."

"He hasn't come in so far," Davy said. He was calm. "Let's take a chance he won't come in for the next few minutes."

But Ken crossed the room and tugged at Davy's arm. "You damn fool! You're always giving me hell for the chances *I* take, but you never caught me trying anything like this!"

Davy freed his arm without turning and took down a copy of *Jeans*. "But this is the kind that really counts. The kind you *have* to take. Listen," he said, turning with sudden fierceness, "do *you* want to trust everything to Beasely's cockeyed arrogance? To hell with him! This degree involves too damn much to let him throw it down the drain without taking every chance there is to save it."

"If I can't pass the lousy exam the way I'm supposed to, to hell with it!"

"Bull!" said Davy. His eyes were bright and angry. He looked down at his older brother, all cold strength, daring and willfulness. "Pull yourself together. *You* know you're a good engineer. You don't have to jump through a hoop for Beasely to prove it. If he wants to act like a damn fool, he's got to be treated like a damn fool."

Ken whirled away in anguish, his heart thudding at every sound in the corridor, but Davy with his nerves rigidly controlled went through the thick volume until he found what he wanted. He read four pages with great care, reread them, then snapped the book closed and replaced it on the shelf.

"We're both right," he announced calmly. "Let's pack in."

Ken collapsed into the desk chair, his fear whirled up into the tornado of relief and elation that spun through him. "You nervy bastard!" he said, gay with admiration. "You haven't pulled anything like that since we ran away from Uncle George!"

Davy gathered his papers together on the desk. He glanced down at Ken and his eyes seemed dark as a forest pool at midnight, glittering softly as if two drenched boys were pushing through the black water to the shore. "You would have died worrying if I hadn't checked the answer," Davy said; and although he spoke lightly, he was still fulfilling a dedicated promise nine years old. "I just saved your life, you damned fool!"

Chapter Three

The darkest torment of every nightmare is man's ultimate helplessness.

The evil dream begins with insidious innocence. Then the well-known friend, still smiling his familiar smile, reveals himself as the enemy; the room one has known for thousands of days subtly darkens until too late one sees that all along the place had been set with inescapable traps. At last, the dream swirls into cold horror — and there is nothing to do but stand mute and paralyzed as catastrophe pours down from the nightmare sky. This is the moment that is so much the essence of madness that the dream bursts because torment has gone beyond bearing.

The Monday morning following the examination was just such a time for Davy; and the moment that Ken walked into the garage talking animatedly to the fat man was the moment when Davy was struck dumb, even though locked in his throat was the frantic cry — “*Stop it!*”

Earlier, he and Ken had gone to the bank in the roadster according to their original plan. But by ten o'clock, they were on their way back, stunned — each one busy with his own recapitulation of what had gone wrong. Davy held the old briefcase squarely on his lap, wondering why, in all the years he had lived in anticipation through this morning, not once had he ever imagined they would return empty-handed.

Long ago, Ken had made a list of all the things he would buy when their financing would finally be arranged. From month to month since then, the daydreamed list had been changed and lengthened to include still another suit, or a still faster car; but Davy had always smiled. Davy too had drawn up a list, but his included nothing for himself except when Ken had prodded him.

“Listen, Davy, no brother of mine is going around looking like a tramp!”

“All right,” Davy would say. “But we’ll get one of those new vacuum pumps, and a lathe — we really need a nice lathe, Ken —”

Now the daydream was over, and the golden lists seemed only a catalogue of childish longings. Ken was to go on being shabby; and Davy was to go on being without a laboratory.

The shocked silence lasted all the way to the garage. Without a word Davy got out and unlocked the doors while Ken drove the Dodge into the familiar shadowed coolness. Ken stepped down from the car and began to loosen his tie without looking directly at his brother.

"All right, Davy," he said quietly. "Don't stand there as if the end of the world had come. Brock will be back next week and we'll tackle him then."

"Will we?"

"We certainly will. You know we will!" Ken's voice was sharp.

"I know that we won't. We messed it. Listen," Davy said, "when you plan to put a proposition to the president of the bank, you don't spill it to his fourth assistant just because the boss is out! This idea was to be sold directly to the man who was going to put up the money — to Brock. Yesterday on the picnic didn't we work that out all over again with Margot?"

"Well —"

"Did we or didn't we?"

"All right, we did, but what was I supposed to do?"

"Nothing, that's what! Just nothing. You should have said, OK, we'll be back next week. But no, not you, baby! And the colder Lustig got, the more graphs and diagrams you threw at him! He really gave us the bum's rush, or didn't you know you were getting it?"

"All *right!*" Ken said sharply. "So I did it! Hell, I don't know why. Listen, you, Margot and Vicky were laughing yesterday while I was practicing —"

"We weren't laughing *at* you."

"All right, I laughed too, but it wasn't funny. That damned speech was inside me and it just came out on schedule whether the right man was there to listen to it or not."

"Why didn't you telephone first and ask for an appointment?"

For a moment, Ken looked at him blankly. "Jesus! Well — why didn't *you* think of it?"

"Because you're the one who was going to raise the money."

"Then *you* raise it. God, Davy, you're always so damn full of criticism when anything goes wrong, but I never see *you* sticking your neck out."

Davy turned to him quickly with an angry gaze that he lowered after a moment. He loosened his own tie and took off his coat.

"No, Ken," he said in a quiet voice. "That's your job. You do it."

"Then let me do it my own way. If it's not Brock, it'll be someone else."

Ken moved towards the rear of the shop for his work clothes. Davy watched him.

"Any ideas?" Davy asked bitterly.

Ken turned for a moment to measure the lingering rebellion, and then snapped his fingers.

"I'll find them on trees!" he said and walked off.

A car outside sounded its horn for gasoline, but Davy ignored it. In another moment, Ken returned, dressed in coveralls. The horn repeated the demand for attention and Ken took advantage of the call to pass through the garage without a word. Davy listlessly changed his own clothes, but when he tried to work, his movements were futile. How could Ken have been so blind to all of his silencing signals? And as for himself, Davy wondered, why had he just sat there like a lump, knowing Ken's mistake and still refusing to take matters into his own hands?

Like a lump! Davy belabored himself with the blubbing insult. No, he was going to have this out with Ken, once and for all. He glanced at the clock and his anger flamed into fury because twenty-five minutes had passed since Ken had gone out. Davy looked at the door. The gas customer's car was still there. For Christ's sake, Davy thought, is Ken making another *friend*?

Just at that moment, as if armored by sunlight against the anger that awaited him, Ken came in. He was leading a stranger — a short, round, square-faced man close to fifty, a city man used to the lobbies of big hotels and smoking cars. His pale eyes were shrewd; his small mouth was pursed with an amused but skeptical reservation. Even before anything was said, dismay began to burn in Davy because the man was looking at him with a jolly familiar curiosity as if he knew far more about Davy than Davy knew about him.

"Mr. Bannerman," Ken said with formality, "this is my brother and associate, David Mallory. Davy, Mr. Carl Bannerman, press representative of the circus." Ken paused, but in that moment, Davy had a horrifying divination of how Ken had spent the last twenty-five minutes. "Mr. Bannerman may be interested in investing in our development."

Bannerman rolled back his head to look up at Davy and nodded slightly as he murmured, "Christ, another perfect type! I don't know — maybe I'm being a mark, but it certainly tickles me!" He rubbed his pudgy hands and turned to Ken. "Now what's all this you were going to show me?"

Davy moistened his lips. "Ken," he said. "Ken, can I see you a minute?"

"Yes, kid?" Ken replied, but, just as in the bank, Ken was locked in his dream of persuasion. And just as in the bank, Davy could still not bring himself to break the nine-year-old law — self-imposed and self-enforced — that forbade him either to correct Ken or even to appear to differ with him in the presence of an outsider. Davy shook his head in self-dismissal.

Ken looked at him blankly for a moment, and then, from the briefcase on the table, took out the ledger of plans. He let the full weight fall into Bannerman's hands.

"This is our story, Mr. Bannerman," Ken said. "Everything I outlined to you outside is in there — down to the last number."

Bannerman riffled through the book, murmuring page titles — "Filament design — grid geometry — plate potential! Now what the hell is a plate potential? Grid sweep — sweet Jesus!" He chuckled with pleasure at his own incomprehension.

"And I want you to see that special tube I was talking about." Ken took his arm, leading him to the worktable. Davy started to protest, but helplessness paralyzed him.

Ken took down the big box they had just brought back from their student laboratory up on the Hill. He raised the lid, and Davy felt that his own heart was being handled as Ken lifted out the twelve-inch conical glass bubble. Seven small fingers projected radially from the neck of the tube, each sensitive tip ending with a length of wire that extended back to some gleaming metallic element within the tube. Weeks of work had gone into each electrode, and Davy remembered the dedication behind the labor. Never once had he dreamed that it would be shown just this way. This was not revelation — this was plain exposure.

He looked down at his clasped hands in front of him, steeling himself to wait until Bannerman would be gone.

"This is the tube." Ken held it up for inspection. "The flat end is the screen where you'd see the picture."

Bannerman peered more closely at the tube.

"How much does a thing like that cost?"

"You couldn't buy one, Mr. Bannerman," Ken said, and Davy listened closely, testing every word, ready to storm out his bitterness at even the faintest trace of cheap salesmanship. Ken, be careful, he prayed. "I don't suppose there are thirty tubes like this in the entire world. It's got a hundred different laboratory uses, but as far as we know, no one has ever thought of using it exactly the way we plan to. Around 1909, a Russian named Rosing had the right idea, but that was before radio vacuum tubes were developed. We first came across a description of Rosing's work in *Popular Mechanics* some six years ago. We've been working on it ever since."

"Then you're all set. What do you need money for?"

Ken shook his head and laughed. Davy glanced up sharply but the laugh was honest. "We still have to build a tube that sends the picture from the transmitting end, a sort of electrical camera. That's the one that's going to look at a scene the way you read a page of print. Your eye never sees a page as a whole: it reads across letter by letter; then down, line by line. That's what I called scanning."

Bannerman shook his head as he handed the ledger back to Ken — the amusement had become mostly respect, but he chuckled again.

"This sounds as if it could be the most perfect con going. I mean, you boys don't just happen to graduate *every* June to devote yourselves to an invention — just for the sake of innocent passers-by, do you? That wouldn't be nice, you know." He glanced sharply from one brother to the other and then laughed. "No, it's probably the real goods. Look, I don't know what it's all about, and you *know* I don't know. But it sounds like it might just be the kind of flyer I've been looking for lo, these many years. It certainly has the words all right — beautiful words — *plate potential* — brother!" He was lost in admiration for a moment, and then he became brisk. "Come down this afternoon about three-thirty. Here's a couple of passes. Just ask for me. By the way, who knows you boys here in town?"

"That's our trouble, everybody knows us," Ken said, smiling a little. "People here figure anyone they've known all their lives couldn't possibly come up with something special. But you can ask up at the University, or even Norton Wallis —"

"The fellow who invented the automobile or something?"

Ken smiled. "Well, not exactly."

Bannerman looked at him — the connoisseur. "That *smile!* By God, boy, you tickle me! That's America for you. Drive five thousand miles

for a circus and run out of gas in front of a gold mine — a potential gold mine!" He added with soft fervor: "Sweet Jesus, how I love that word! It tickles me. OK, boys, catch me later. 'By."

Ken and Davy watched him bustle through the door and then slowly turned to each other.

"What do you think of that?" Ken asked in an awed voice. His face was glowing. "What did I tell you? On trees!"

"You damned fool!" Davy said quietly when he found his voice. His eyes were bitterly brilliant. "What the hell did you do now? Shooting off your mouth to a clown like that —!"

"Now, wait —"

"Wait? *Wait?* What do you think we've been doing all along? Except for the old man, we never told an outsider a word about the idea! Did we tell anybody up on the Hill? We weren't going to tell a soul until we found the right man. Wait? Christ, we waited all right! But you spilled the works to the first son of a bitch we meet. The bank was bad enough, but *this!* Damn you! You've spoiled the whole taste of the work for me. You made it cheap — a lousy promotion — you don't really care, that's all!" He took a deep breath. "Just tell me one thing: how did you happen to break it to him of all people?"

"Well," said Ken slowly. He was very sober and pale. "I don't really know any more. We got to talking and somehow the word 'original' came up. It opened something inside me. I guess I was still sore about the bank, and about you, if you want to know. I remember saying that he didn't know the real meaning of the word. I kept on talking and he was interested. The more he got interested, the more I talked." He looked up at Davy for a moment, and he burst into laughter. "What are we beefing about, anyhow? According to you the very worst that can happen is that he'll want to put up some money. That's no insult! Listen, Davy, do you realize we've never been to a circus in our lives? We never even owned a ball glove between us. I say to hell with it all! Come on, Davy, take it easy, kid. You're lucky to have a big brother to watch out for you, and this afternoon, your big brother is going to take you to the circus!"

Davy looked down at him with a small, slow smile, even though there was the sting of angry tears behind his eyes. He shook his head helplessly, because as usual, he was completely disarmed.

"Boy, you tickle me!" he murmured. His voice almost trembled with his frustration. "You dirty dog, you really *do!*"

He smiled, but the worry remained deep and anguished in his eyes.

That afternoon, Carl Bannerman was as wary, as taut and as desperately concerned as the two boys who sat facing him. But where Ken and Davy were perfectly transparent to him, he crouched behind a blandly skeptical friendliness. He sensed that he had stumbled across the threshold of a golden dream, and his intuition kept screaming at him "Say *yes, yes, yes*" until he had to jam his outstretched hand over the scolder's mouth, so that he could hear what these boys were saying. The one outer sign of his feelings was the unusual stillness with which he listened to them, because if one of the delights in life is sheer activity, then Carl Bannerman was a man who had lived for pleasure alone.

He darted across the surface of existence, from job to job, from town to town, from interest to interest, from woman to woman, from one group of lifelong friends to another, always on impulse and with never a backward glance.

He could not sit in a chair without bounding out of it after five minutes; he never held a conversation without interrupting himself. At fifty, he treated himself as if he were a slender boy of twenty. For always, in the next hour, he was going to turn a corner, find a million dollars on the sidewalk and meet the most beautiful woman in the world. They would fall in love with each other at first sight, but *real* love, you know — all passion and tenderness, not one of these goddam chippies — fall in love, as he was saying, and live happily ever after.

In 1892, his eighteenth year, he rode in his father's buggy to the railroad station at Watertown, New York, and spent six months high above Cayuga's waters — "Kid, whenever I even *see* the word Cornell, I get a lump in my throat. The man's a son of a bitch who'll forget his alma mater" — six months being the minimum probation period; and because he never attended classes, he was dropped. Traveling with a Chatauqua lecturer, he got to Little Rock and found a job on the newspaper, and left that to go to Cuba in '98 as a correspondent for the old *St. Louis Intelligencer* — "There, sweetheart, *that* was a peach of a paper and Richard Harding Davis cried on my shoulder when it folded, poor Dick!" He returned to Little Rock, and there he turned that magic corner to meet the first of a succession of the most beautiful women in the world, Adele Reilly — "A real Russian grand duke shot

himself for her in Monte Carlo"—a trapeze artiste with the Uhlenbeck International Circus and Fox Brothers Traveling Museum, a woman of gorgeous curves, blondined hair, unbelievable strength and the mind of a mongoose. "She used to eat me alive, and by Christ, I loved the very feel of her molars in my flesh!" Even when he was old enough to realize in retrospect that he had been only a nagging adolescent hanger-on to an ordinary woman who simply didn't love him, he persisted in reliving the episode as one of the great tragedies in the romantic tradition. He stayed with circuses and carnivals in every possible capacity, including a few years on the grift with the famous Tight Pants Charlie Hand, who at that time was running a modest mitt store—"finest, most intelligent, philosophical mind I ever came across, but he really was *cruel* to the marks, couldn't stand their dishonesty"—and ran through a succession of the most beautiful women in the world, cherishing each brassy failure as one more excursion into empyrean passion. He could say feelingly about every one of them—"Kid, when we used to look at each other, chancelleries tottered! Why the God-damn things just *shook!*"

He had three ambitions—to be as rich as John D. Rockefeller, to spend like Diamond Jim Brady, and to live like Edward VII, and so far he had never done anything serious about achieving any of them. Yet, as clearly as he knew the facts of life in his world of sham, betrayed confidences, paltry swindles, he cherished in his heart the highly romantic ideal that when he would some day strike it rich, it would be by dignified means. It would have to have *class*.

He looked at the two garage kids sitting uneasily on the other side of his desk in the small hut on wheels that was his office. The one who did all the talking was bright, an impulsive gambler, only superficially naïve because he was the kind of person who loved to be liked. On the other hand, the dark kid was nobody's fool either. The way to handle them, Bannerman decided, was to make friends with one and make sense to the other. He liked them both.

Then he looked at Davy again; and realized that he hadn't seen through the boy at all.

Both boys looked combed and clean, slightly uncomfortable in their fight to overcome the bewilderment at the continual distractions. The seven elephants trod heavily past the open door on their way to the big top; in the distance the calliope was shrill and weird in its tune-up. He had listened to them with an unusual care that was close to desperation because all in a gust had come a sudden swirl of loathing for his

own life, so wasteful, tacky and third-rate in its pleasures. Suddenly, he wanted them to be right. He was for their success with all the devouring passion with which he had first fallen in love.

Yet for all his impetuosity, the moment he began to speak, intuition told him that while he would be addressing Ken, he was really talking to Davy.

"I've been sitting here listening to you," he went on. "Of course, I didn't understand *everything* you said, but what I did get is this: this Russian you mentioned this morning — Rosing — he was never able to make the thing work because since he got his patent there've been a lot of inventions —"

"The whole art of vacuum tubes," said Ken.

"Art of vacuum tubes." Bannerman memorized his lesson. "Without which he couldn't get to first base. And anyhow your entire system is — what?"

"All electronic."

"All electronic, and his wasn't. OK. But what gets me —" Bannerman interrupted his own lecture — "are you *sure* the big electrical companies back east aren't hot on this too?"

"They just aren't. Davy and I check every research journal we can. There isn't a sign that anyone is onto this yet. They're all up a blind alley of trying to do it mechanically, and this is one thing that's just got to be electronic."

"Electronic. But I still don't get it."

In his confusion, Bannerman instinctively had turned to Davy, but it was Ken who answered.

"Well, you tell me why a big outfit like Edison's didn't do radio research in the days when Marconi was the lone wolf."

"All right, all right. I can't argue with you two boys. But what I *do* get is this: if this thing pans out, it'll be bigger than the movies, bigger than radio — you'll have the whole damned entertainment industry by the short hairs —"

"Entertainment?" Ken said dubiously. He looked at Davy, who said nothing.

Then I was right, Bannerman thought, Davy is the one who counts most.

"Of course, entertainment," Bannerman repeated. "What did you think you had here?"

"Well, hell, we're engineers. I guess if anything, we thought of communications."

"Chicken feed!" Bannerman said. "Didn't wireless start out to be just a way to beat the cable monopoly? Then some guy started playing dance records on a ham sender, and look at radio now — it's made the country into one big vaudeville house. You engineers and inventors never learn. You can give the public any damn gadget you want, but sooner or later the public is going to find a way to use it to have some fun. When I say steam engine, do you think of power plants? No, you think of pretty excursion boats. For Christ's sake, people are only human — they want a good time. Look at the way they flock into this two-bit circus, town after town, year after year, begging, pleading for a little color, a little noise, a little illusion. Why the hell do you begrudge it to them?"

Ken laughed. "We don't begrudge it to them. We just didn't think about it."

Bannerman shook his head. "I don't care what business you're in, you got to satisfy some basic human desire — whether it's food, love, entertainment or even larceny. Even larceny, and don't overlook that one. I once knew a man — very casually," he added, but he was still close enough to the truth to feel that he was being strictly honest with the boys. "This man made a living catering to the larceny that's hidden in the human heart. All he did was to imply that a fast buck could be made at someone else's expense, if he only had the wherewithal to get the ball rolling. It was appalling, *appalling*, to watch the way so-called honest merchants were willing to shell out that wherewithal. Of course this man I knew simply walked off with that wherewithal, and there were no kickbacks because how could an honest merchant go to the cops and say, I was robbed while trying to rob another man? He was catering to a human need and the marks fought to give him their dollars, just the way they fight to come in here. Find a human craving, and you got yourself a kingdom of gold! That's what you boys have here. Hell, this thing has got fame, fortune and Paradise all rolled up into one!"

He saw Ken's eyes shine. OK, Bannerman thought, that's his catnip. What about the other? The other was watching him with dark gravity.

Again Bannerman tried to read Davy's expression; and it suddenly occurred to him that Davy's eyes had the watchfulness of a man who was prepared to spring and kill him if he were to put soiled hands one inch closer to something that Davy loved. Bannerman breathed very slowly, and he realized that never before in his life had he been so afraid of saying the wrong thing. Listen, kid, he wanted to plead, I

swear I'm as much for this as you are. I don't want it to be cheap. I want it to have *class*, too!

"How about it?" Bannerman asked.

"Anything that Ken says goes with me," Davy said quietly. He paused and then added. "Only you haven't said what *you* plan to do?"

"That's a straight question and it rates a straight answer," Bannerman said, fighting for time. "I checked on you boys. I called Norton Wallis. Why didn't you tell me he was putting up a thousand dollars?"

"The fact is, Mr. Bannerman," Ken said quickly, "we're selling this thing on its merits alone. We want people with faith in *us*, in the idea — not in someone else's business judgment."

Bannerman looked at him with twinkling appreciation. "You mean you didn't know he was coming in."

Ken laughed. "You still haven't said what you plan to do," he reminded Bannerman.

"And you still haven't said how much you'd need."

"Five thousand dollars," Davy said quickly.

Bannerman pursed his lips. The figure was probably three or even less, he thought. That kid doesn't want me in.

"A lot of money," he conceded slowly. "What will it buy?"

"Eight months of both of us working full time, and all the equipment we'd need to develop and build a working camera tube," Davy said. "Most of the money would go for testing apparatus and pumping equipment for high-vacuum work. Our salaries would be just what we need to eat."

"Eight months means next spring. We could start manufacturing a year from now. All right, but the first thing to do is to establish whether this idea of yours is any good or not. I can't judge it for myself. Suppose I arrange to have you explain it all to a group of expert engineers I pick?"

Ken was watchful. "OK, providing *we* think they're experts too."

He's looking at me with his brother's face, Bannerman decided. How the hell does this pair really operate?

"Well," said Bannerman, "some of the biggest experts are right here in this town — the engineering professors in the University. It's been my experience that you can pay a professor to listen to an idea that he's an expert on, and he'll give you his expert opinion on it. Like a lawyer or a doctor. How about if I arrange to have a kind of jury listen to you for a couple of hours some day soon?"

"That's all right with me," said Ken. "What about you, Davy?"

"Whatever you say, Ken."

"That won't do, Davy. Let's be open about this. If we hurt Mr. Bannerman's feelings, that's just too bad."

"Well," said Davy, "we're entitled to some protection if we're going to make disclosures."

"He's right," Ken said, turning back to the older man. "We have no patent applications. We take a big chance in making it public. Our only protection is to get to work right away. To get to work, we're going to need money. If the faculty can't shoot any holes in our plan, Mr. Bannerman, will you undertake to raise that five thousand dollars?" Before Bannerman could answer, Ken faced his brother. "That suit you, Davy?"

"Anything you say, Ken."

"Does it suit you?" Ken insisted.

"It suits me fine," Davy said.

"That's our direct question, Mr. Bannerman," Ken said. "What's the answer?"

"The answer is yes," Bannerman replied with intuitive swiftness. "I will."

Davy stood up and smiled, and then Ken said, "It's a deal. You arrange it, Mr. Bannerman."

Bannerman sat there, shaken by the scope of his commitment. He could write a check for two thousand dollars that would clean him out and still leave him owing the round sixteen hundred he should have paid out months ago. Yet Bannerman's face was impassive. He had simply attuned himself to the boys' mood, and concentrated on answers to the challenges that would disarm their suspicions. It was one way of doing business; not a gambler's, nor even a promoter's, but something halfway between that of a confidence man and a messiah. Still, there wasn't too much to lose, nor need there be any loss at all, for if matters began to look hopeless, he could always call in Tight Pants Charlie, now Colonel Sheaffer of Palm Beach, and they could make it a one-shot grift and get the money back and a hell of a lot more. Bannerman would certainly hate to have to do it to these nice kids, but what the hell — He angrily dismissed the idea as disloyal to his dream of *class*. It was going to be all right, he assured himself.

Yet if he himself were shaken by what he had just agreed to do, he noticed that the boys were too. They were both walking to the door with the careful stiffness of the stunned.

They walked that way for several silent moments, insensible to the noise, the grotesque sights, the garishness of the color.

"What do you think, Davy?" Ken asked after a while. His voice was subdued.

"God, I don't know."

"You don't like it. I can see that. Let's drop it, kid, to hell with him."

"Because I don't like it?"

"Well, you don't. This morning you said I didn't give a damn about the work, that I took no pride in it. You know that's not true."

"I was just sore, Ken. Forget it. But what's the matter? You feel funny?"

"I sure do. Right here." Ken held his hand to his stomach.

"I'll tell you something," Davy said slowly. "I don't think that it's Bannerman that's bothering us. The fact is, somebody's just called our bluff. We've got to deliver."

Ken turned. "You think that's it? Well, whatever it is—" he took a deep breath as if to relieve a constriction in his chest—"it sure *presses!*"

3

They left the circus grounds, roweled by a restlessness that found relief neither in silence nor in fitful talk. They had been promised their chance to give reality to their one dream; yet elation never touched them because the opportunity was so entirely different from what they had expected. They drove aimlessly into the summer afternoon countryside, waiting for clarity to burn away their confusion, but the doubts persisted. Suddenly, Ken remembered that neither of them had thought of calling Margot all day. Things had been happening too fast.

They drove back to town and stopped at the nearest telephone booth, but she had already left the store. It was after five-thirty. They sped home, but Margot wasn't there either.

Davy was the one who found the note from Vicky. To come across his own name written in her handwriting gave him a spurt of pleasure, as if he had turned around to find she had been standing by his side all along.

"It says that we're supposed to go up there for supper," he said to

Ken. "But that sounds crazy. The old man never asks people to eat with him."

He went to the wall telephone and called Wallis's number, still holding the note in his hand so that he could look again and again at the miraculous intimacy of her writing. Vicky answered before the ringing was completed.

"Where have you two been all this time? Your sister has been calling and calling to see if we had heard from either of you."

"Oh, we were just out," he said. He hadn't thought of her all day, and yet there she was—thinking of him, worrying about him. He imagined her dark expressive eyes looking into his own, her lips parted as he spoke as if she were impatient to break in on him. He wanted to touch her hair to see if her curls were as soft and fine as they looked. "Listen," he went on, "this note—is there anything wrong?"

"Wrong?"

"It's such a nice surprise, that's all. It never happened before—the way he's been living—"

"Well, he doesn't live that way any more," she laughed. "Wait, your sister wants to talk to you."

Margot's anxious voice grew into the receiver. "What happened at the bank? Why didn't you call? And who is that Bannerman who phoned here?"

But Davy's eyes were still filled with the image of Vicky looking at him. "It's a long story," he said. "We'll be right up."

"Just tell me if it's good or bad."

"I guess it's good. We may be getting the money."

"And you just *guess*? Oh, hurry up here—both of you!"

They found Norton Wallis all alone on his porch, sitting stiffly with his blind man's immobility, and because he was all dressed up in the high stiff collar and tight-fitting serge cut in the fashion of a decade earlier. He sat there as if special responsibilities had been imposed on him and he sensed their surprise from their silence.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Can't I look decent once in a while? Oh, hell, it's *her* idea," he said, nodding to the house behind him. "Ever since she got here, she's been turning the place upside down with her cleaning and dusting and all. Went through all the closets and found this in mine. Said it needed airing." He rose from the rocker, standing with awkward erectness, tugging his coat and

sleeves straight. "Had it made in Chicago ten — twelve years ago. Like iron."

Margot came hurrying out with Vicky. They both had aprons on. Davy watched Vicky, but Ken started at once to tell them what had happened. All the while Davy gently fingered the note folded away in his pocket. He saw himself saving it for a long time, and then, some evening, when they'd be arguing about who had loved the other first, he would prove his claim by showing that he had kept her note all that time.

"I told him I was putting up a thousand dollars," Wallis said when Ken had finished. The old man appeared to be staring off into remote distances, but he held his head that way only because he saw best from the corner of his eyes. "But I didn't mean I'd give *him* any thousand dollars. I'd give you boys the money, but if you go in with him, I'll hold it until you break with him. It'll be kind of a cushion for you."

"That's up to you," Ken said. "But it's a little soon to be talking about making a break with him."

"Well, you will," said Wallis reasonably. "It's just bound to happen. Even if he wasn't Bannerman."

"But you said you don't know him."

"I don't have to know him. After a while, you'll hate him and he'll hate you." The old man had lowered his head slightly and his voice had taken on the darker color of memory, so that it was impossible to tell what he was seeing or how long ago it had taken place. "Doesn't make any difference whether he's putting up five thousand dollars or five cents. He's the man with the money and you're the ones with the ideas. He can be a nice man or a bad man — you'll still fight. That's the way it is. All my life, the only men I've ever fought with are the men with the money and I've lived a long time." He was silent for a while. "Well, there's no point in talking about it, though. Not unless you hear from him again."

"You don't think they will?" Margot asked quickly.

"I don't think about what people do or don't do any more," he said.

"I think it sounds wonderful." Vicky was saying it directly to Ken, Davy noticed. He was pleased because there would now be four of them together instead of just three. She went on: "What difference does it make where the money comes from?"

"I'm beginning to agree with Vicky," Davy said, so that she had to

turn around to him — blankly for a moment — and then she smiled.

Later, whenever he remembered how pleased he had been by her smile or how quietly happy he had been that night, he would writhe inwardly with shame because by then he knew that her smile had been only surprise: she hadn't even noticed him standing there until his voice had pleaded with her to look at him.

"Just the same," Margot was saying, "I want to meet that Mr. Bannerman."

She said the same thing the next morning as she left for work. With all the talk, Ken came to the miserable conclusion that the whole thing was a mistake and was all his fault. They would never see him again anyhow. Davy said that they would. Two hours after Margot had gone, Bannerman bustled into the garage to say that he was trying to arrange a date for their presentation. In the meantime, he said, a lawyer was drawing up an agreement which would serve as a basis for negotiation. Bannerman sounded as if consulting lawyers and professors whom he had never met presented no difficulty at all.

The following day, two letters arrived at the garage. One announced that he had finally got up a committee of professors from Engineering and Physics to meet on June twenty-sixth to listen to them. He himself would be out of town until then because the circus was moving west to Wisconsin.

That second letter was on a lawyer's stationery, and stated that pursuant to the verbal agreement of the twelfth, Carl Bannerman had arranged an opportunity for a panel of experts in the field of electrical communication to pass on the projected invention. Should the panel approve the scientific principles involved, the Mallory brothers would give Bannerman thirty days in which to negotiate an agreement satisfactory to all parties. Their signature in the blank space provided hereinbelow would mark their agreement herewith.

The formality of the letter was impressive. Even though nobody was committed to very much, the letter suggested a picture of Bannerman enthusiastically explaining his interest to a hard-boiled lawyer and to several of their former professors. All this must be costing Bannerman money, and for the first time Davy began to believe the rustling reality in the words *five thousand dollars*. Ken and Davy signed their names, returned the letter and sat down to wait, but now that they had allowed their hopes to be raised, the waiting was torture.

Naturally, Ken was the one to make the presentation, and he and Davy set to work getting their notes in order. There were no longer

any nights out, and Davy's visits to Norton Wallis were brief and perfunctory. Since Vicky had arrived, the old man had lost the desperate loneliness that used to strike Davy as forcibly as a musty odor. Wallis now grumbled with half-concealed pleasure at the changes she made in his life, but he complained with real hurt when she began to speak of the bookstore.

"What bookstore?" asked Davy, who was spending a few minutes on the porch with him. "Since when have you been looking for a job, Vicky?"

"Since the day before yesterday. If I'm going to be here for a while, I might as well get a job. I'm used to working."

"Ah, it's just plain foolishness if you ask me." Wallis stopped the motion of his rocking chair. "What's the sense of being here at all if I'll never see you? Besides I don't hold with women working unless they have to. Or voting either, for Christ's sakes. When I was a young man, I would have pitched my tools in the river if someone had told me the day was coming when my own granddaughter living in my own house would be going to work. I don't understand this country any more. Nothing solid any more, nobody but pygmies and horse thieves in politics — everything cheap, fast and jazzy until last week two rich boys in Chicago with everything in the world killed another one just for a thrill!" He spat his revulsion over the railing. "Well, some newspaper writer once said I'm one of the men who helped make the country that way, but damned if I meant it to turn out like this. Child, I just wish you wouldn't take that job."

"But we discussed that already, Grandpa."

"We can discuss it again, can't we?"

"No," she said. "Not and make any difference."

Two days later she took the job. She told Davy that she liked the work very much, but he didn't ask her whether she had made any new friends. He wanted to go on believing that she was waiting just for him to get some free time. All she ever wanted to talk about was how their preparations were coming — and was Ken getting nervous.

A week before the presentation date, Ken's nerves began to go.

"They'll laugh at us, they'll laugh!" he said, slapping the notes in desperation. "We don't know what we're talking about, Davy. Whenever I tell you that, you say 'Look at the ledger.' Hell, who *wrote* that damned ledger? We're not going to make one statement we can't back up. And we can talk all we want about current pulses and scanning, but that's one thing we never had time to get around to seeing."

"How could we? This tube wasn't finished until ten days before the exams. But all the preliminary tests —"

"To hell with preliminary tests. It's the final test that counts, and this is one thing I want to *see*."

Davy said nothing more. For his own part, he was willing to trust the calculations that had been worked out in calmness. Four tubes made earlier this year had all been failures even though each one had been an improvement over the one before. If this particular untested Braun tube didn't behave properly, then some tube built in the future would. The theory was absolutely sound. Then Davy thought of his responsibility. Ken had to go into that room so sure of himself that no one would dare challenge him. He let out a long sigh and slowly got to his feet.

"Let's see if I can set it up now," he said. "We'll start with a horizontal sweep of fifty and a vertical of thirty. Give me an hour or so."

Ken pushed the papers away. "I can do it faster. Set up the tube, and I'll throw together the timing circuits myself."

So much time, work and care had gone into the construction of the Braun cathode ray tube that Davy treated it as a rare jewel. At least once a night since they had brought it home, he would carefully lift off the rags to inspect it, to be sure once again that the tube hadn't imploded under the strain of its own vacuum or that a crack hadn't knifed out from some insidiously hidden flaw in one of the glass-to-metal electrode seals. The tube was their own property now according to the terms of their agreement with the University because they had made it themselves.

Davy took it from the box and clamped it in its horizontal felt-lined cradle, delicately made the terminal connections to the glass fingers and only then wiped the nervous sweat from his hands on the chest of his shirt. His anxiety for the tube made him glance at it continually while he turned on the gasoline engine for the a.c. generator.

The small engine coughed in his hands and then began to throb smoothly, permeating the garage with its persistent murmur. Ken finished the timing circuits and was now wiring them to the oscilloscope.

Ken rarely needed a diagram to follow: he could improvise the most complex circuits out of the elements themselves as he wired them together. Davy watched him with a wistful admiration that was never envy.

To shut out the light, Davy swung the garage doors together. The enclosed darkness grew taut with expectancy, wound tighter by the sustained thread of the generator's hum. Ken stood away from the assembled oscilloscope, so that Davy, with more patience, could take the seat at the control panel of knobs and switches.

The first switch turned on a faint glow in the narrow neck of the conical tube because a slender filament became incandescent with current. The full intensity of the light was hidden, shielded within a small cylinder the size and shape of a .45-caliber bullet case.

When Davy closed the second switch, the bullet case silently surged up to voltage and its inner recess was bombarded by the high-velocity electrons from the scorching wire. A tiny hole had been drilled in the end of the cartridge and, through this, a thin needle of invisible particles with two thousand volts of energy streamed into the rest of the tube. A third switch created an electrical ravine for the electrons down which they coursed at even higher velocities than before: a ravine with voltage walls so steep that any particles that might wander out of the main stream were hurled back along the bottom course, from which emerged a tightly focused beam of impalpable power.

The only sign that anything was happening took place at the flat end of the tube, coated white on the inside. Here the needle stream of electrons stung its microscopic energies into a spot of the soft oxide. The concentration created a tiny disc of greenish fluorescence: a spot of baleful light that trembled, wandered very slightly, but always darted back to its own center. The pale quick motion made it seem nervously alive.

"Try the vertical field," Ken said.

The fourth switch clicked on the panel board. The tiny shivering ball of light slowly lengthened into a standing luminescent thread. In each thousandth of a second now a new mountain heaved up directly in the line of the electron stream, and then collapsed into a canyon as deep as it had been high. This surging rise and fall sprayed electrons up and down the inside face of the tube so fast that the human eye saw only a line marked by the racing beam — a line that seemed to weave and tremble along its length like a thread of light suspended in a breathing subtle draught. And all this took place because one thousand and five hundred volts alternated one thousand times a second between two small square wafers of silvered brass, one above and one below the beam of focused electrons.

Davy cut off the vertical voltage and impressed a similar one on the

other set of plates that flanked the beam on either side. The white line on the face of the Braun tube collapsed again into a dot and then expanded sideways into a horizontal rippling line as supple and sinuous as the other.

"Now scan it," Ken said.

All the switches went down. As if a window had been raised on moonlight, a large square of luminous light appeared on the face of the tube.

Davy stared at the glowing square for a moment, and then carefully turned a knob that would determine whether or not they were ready to make their presentation. The square grew larger, but suddenly the solid white glow fell apart into chaos. The two oscillating fields within the tube were working with no relation to each other, and the electron beam was racing all over the screen, too fast to be seen except as this unending convoluted streak.

Davy's face was impassive in the greenish reflected light, but he could feel Ken's sick disappointment as keenly as his own. Neither spoke, but Ken got up from his chair, found a screw driver in the half darkness, wrapped its wooden handle in a sheet of rubber and then gingerly managed to reach a condenser screw without touching anything else. A fat blue spark spat viciously at the contact. Ken gave it a quarter turn. He removed his extended hand with the same care.

"How is it now?" he asked.

"Come and look," said Davy.

Ken walked around behind his brother. On the face of the tube was the same solid square of luminous white moonlight. Davy turned the spreading knob once again. The window that had come open before on chaos now revealed a series of perfectly straight horizontal bars. Davy closed the pattern again, and the lines merged into the solid square exactly as theory predicted.

Their tube worked.

With a sudden sweep of his hand that was arrogant triumph, Davy threw off all the switches and glanced up at Ken.

"Now have you seen it?" he asked mildly.

Ken looked down at his brother, smiling a little with his eyes.

"I've seen it."

"And do we know what we're talking about?"

Ken's smile took on irony. "You mean do we now, or did we before?"

He walked back to the table that was covered with the ledger and the notes, and began to write in the ledger.

"You know those four Braun tubes we made that were supposed to be failures?" he said without looking up. "They weren't failures at all."

Davy paused. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. What was wrong from the beginning was the synchronizing circuit. The circuit we just used is one I just made up while putting it together. I'm entering it now. What we saw on the face of the tube wasn't any new tube at all. It was only that new circuit."

Davy was silent. He disengaged the Braun tube very thoughtfully, and then sat down next to Ken, submissively picking up the notes again to continue the preparation.

The work went forward but neither of them mentioned that Ken's discovery meant that they had wasted almost a full year because of the oversight. Such accidents were the ordinary hazards they knew they must be prepared to face; but each one was grateful to the other for the silence because each one felt that somehow the fault must have been his own.

4

For the presentation, a seminar room had been set aside — a room in which Davy and Ken had sat many times for many lectures — but now they felt strange and unsure as if they had been away for a long time and doubted whether anyone would recognize or even remember them.

The sunshine and the June green of the trees gave the campus outside the air of country peace. Davy and Ken came as strangers, and these men with familiar faces waiting for them had the power to tear them apart. No examination had ever been this crucial.

The six members of the faculty were congregated near the window. Some leaned on the sill. The others seated themselves in tilted chairs looking out on the campus. Their glances at Ken and Davy were friendly enough, but there was also curiosity. A stranger had come and said that these two very young men might be worth a great deal of money if what they claimed was true; and the faculty members, like Cinderella's sisters, looked very hard to see what had gone unnoticed all these past years.

Bannerman and the lawyer, Stewart, were the last to arrive. They were in good humor, taking their cue from the faculty; and they were neither on the side of the Mallorys nor their opponents as yet.

In the warm summer morning all attitudes were weighing in the balance. Davy felt the isolation very keenly and he could tell that Ken was under strain too. Stewart, a tall man of fifty-five, opened his briefcase on the table in the front of the room and extracted a set of typewritten sheets.

"Before we begin," he said, and so informally began the proceedings, "I have here a memorandum dictated to me yesterday morning by Kenneth and David Mallory. It is their statement of the basic principles of their invention, the one that you will hear in a few minutes. In all fairness to them and to protect them in their disclosures, you will all affix your signatures to this after the hearing. The paragraph you will be asked to sign reads as follows: 'We, the undersigned, were all present together on the 26th of June 1925 when the above disclosures were made.' That's all you are asked to sign. Neither approval nor disapproval is asked. You just listened to it, that's all. The document will serve as a record of invention and, after it is signed, it will be given to the Mallorys to keep against any future contingency."

"What kind of contingency?" Beasely asked dryly.

"Any subsequent patent action," Stewart replied. His sober face seemed to note but not acknowledge his awareness of hostility. "It will prove that Kenneth and David Mallory were already at work along these lines as early as the present date. It may be important some day to be able to prove that."

"And how are we bound to them?" Beasely asked again.

"You are not bound in any way. Let me make this clear. My client is Mr. Bannerman, not the Mallorys. If any of you have *already* done work along exactly these lines and have dated proof of it, this document will serve to establish your own independence. If any of you should be stimulated by what you hear to conduct similar work in the future, the document too will be proof that none of your work was anticipated by these disclosures."

"Then we can all have copies of the memorandum?"

"I'll have my secretary mail one to each of you."

Bannerman broke in. By now he was as nerve-racked as Ken and Davy. "Now, wait a minute, everybody. All I was trying to do was to see that everybody here gets a square deal all around. You—the

boys — and me. This is just to keep everybody's nose clean and anyone who has any objections can leave. I'll still pay the agreed fee. Any takers?" Nobody moved. He turned to the boys. "You might as well start, then."

Ken rose and went to the front of the room. His light hair was carefully combed. His face was white. He looked so composed as to be arrogantly careless, but Davy could see the exposed pulse beat of nervousness in his throat. Davy wanted to avert his eyes.

Ken unrolled his notes, which were already limp from handling, looked at his first page for a long moment and then, with desperate resignation, glanced up to face his audience.

"It's a terrible temptation to get right down to technical principles here, without giving you any background," he said, struggling with his voice, so that it sounded cold and low. Then he smiled a little. "But that's because you men here have all been our teachers. Naturally, Davy and I tend to assume that you already know all about it — more than we do. Teachers are supposed to, you know. However, we've been keeping our eyes on every research journal in the library and we haven't found a shred of evidence that anyone else is thinking along the same lines we are. We are absolutely convinced that our method is new. So if it's new at G.E., if it's new at the Bell Labs, whose main concern this should be, don't feel hurt if I act as if it's new to you."

A few of the men smiled, and so far nobody was openly antagonistic. They were prepared to listen further.

"Without talking about any of the implications, industrial, financial or otherwise, let me tell you what we have in mind and what we're shooting for," Ken said. "The way radio instantaneously transmits sound, we want to transmit vision. Radio changes sound waves into electromagnetic radiation and then changes it back to sound at the receiving end. We're going to describe for you a wireless method that will do the same thing for light impulses. Our receiver will be a device that shows a coherent picture of living motion at the very same instant that the action takes place a thousand miles away."

"Which is already in existence, at least in an experimental stage," Beasley remarked. "As you well know."

Ken was not expecting the interruption and Davy thought he would be shaken by it, but Ken merely nodded in agreement. It dawned on Davy that there was something very sure about Ken now that made him no longer a kid.

"That's perfectly true," Ken said to Beasely. "But the method you refer to is just no good and never will be. It depends on mechanically rotating discs and mirrors. The picture at the receiving end doesn't even compare with a newspaper wire photo. Our own system is better and far simpler in principle. Actually ours is the *only* way to do the job because our system is entirely electronic. There will be absolutely no moving parts."

"Even at the transmitting end?" asked Professor Lathrop.

"Nowhere. Let me start at the beginning — at the transmitter. Look, should I go through the basic art of scanning?"

"Do it as you originally planned, Ken," Lathrop said. "People never mind hearing what they already know if it's presented freshly. You just go ahead."

Ken smiled. "Well, I suppose I can skip the principle of the scanning process. Everyone has some idea of it. The question is — what do you scan? In the method Professor Beasely mentioned, they scan the object as if they were looking at a very big picture with a tiny flashlight. The flashlight moves back and forth very rapidly across the picture which is seen one detail at a time. A photocell transforms the reflected light into electrical impulses which can then be transmitted. At the other end, of course, these impulses are used to re-create the original picture. The trouble is that you can never make a light swing back and forth fast enough to get all the changing detail of a scene where there is continuous motion. And that trouble is fatal.

"We get around it, because an electron beam can be made to oscillate back and forth and up and down in a vacuum tube. High-frequency electric fields will do the job. Yesterday, we scanned an unmodulated electron beam ten times faster than any mechanical system ever did. Without the slightest trouble, we could increase that to fifty or a hundred times faster."

"But in your system what do you scan?" Lathrop asked.

"We plan to make use of space charge," Ken said.

He turned to the blackboard and wrote down Langmuir's derivation of Richardson's equation for the current distribution between two plane-parallel electrodes.

"Now let's consider these two electrodes to be a photocell. The collector will be a frame of wires crisscrossed like an open grid. The light shines through it and falls on the inner electrode — the anode, a very fine wire mesh. The side of the mesh facing the light is coated with photosensitive material. The picture to be transmitted

shines on the mesh which emits electrons in the direction of the collector.

"We plan to scan the *back* side of the mesh. Our electron beam will have a zero forward velocity just at the point of the mesh. Where the photoelectric current is light, many electrons from the scanning beam will cross through the mesh in order to fulfill the saturation conditions. Where the current is heavy, only a few will leave the beam. That, basically, is our entire story."

He paused and there was heavy quiet. Davy's heart pounded. He sat very still, keeping his gaze fixed rigidly on Ken's pale, waiting face. The early summer sounds and scents drifted through the room as if it were in a deserted house. Davy found himself wishing with desperation that he were fifteen again, just entering the University, so that nothing then would really be crucial: not the way it was now in these pregnant passing moments.

The long silence ended as a voice spoke out—a friendly voice that hadn't spoken before.

"Would you go over that again, please? This time with a diagram and some numbers? I want to ask a question about the scanning frequencies."

From behind him, Davy heard the room stir—a rustle of movement and breathing as if everyone were settling down. There wasn't the slightest indication yet either of criticism or approbation; but the Mallorys themselves were no longer the center of watchful eyes. Interest had passed from them to an idea; and ideas had their own vitalities.

Davy felt as if he and Ken had just led a long procession into a public square before a hundred thousand silent people; and now that they had made their appearance and stepped out of line, they could join the other spectators and watch the rest of the parade with calm interest.

For the first time since the presentation started, Ken glanced at Davy, and they exchanged invisible smiles. They were no longer afraid, for the long-held secret had finally been stated to the world and there had been no laughter. Lightning had not struck them down for their audacity in announcing that they alone had found the answer which had so far eluded the greatest scientists in that particular field. What was in the ledger would get its own hearing at last, and so while life was suddenly easier, it was also that much more interesting.

Davy turned his chair half around so that he could face the audience

and more easily answer any questions that might come his way. The shrill scraping of the wood didn't embarrass him at all. He was only making himself more available to his brother.

5

When Ken had been very young, no more than an impulse was ever needed to make him accept a challenge, and he would have been secretly ashamed to miss an opportunity. The frantic flight up the tower staircase was never more than an instant of inner terror. The pause in the topmost room took no longer than the time required for his head to turn in desperation; and then, immediately, had come the wild plunge into performance. The challenges used to come in a flash, and were acted upon as quickly.

Now, however, as a young man on the threshold of his career, the ordeal was immeasurably harder. Ever since Bannerman had given his challenge, the retreat up those narrow stairs had gone one embattled step at a time for almost two weeks. Ken had fought every inch of the way through the re-examination of the notes, until he found himself tense and waiting while the enemy pounded on the tower door. Then when the door had been smashed and the familiar questioning faces had burst in, pinning him to the blackboard with their interest, there had been no recourse but to turn and leap once more. But this time the miracle had happened. He didn't fall at all: he flew — soaring at will, breaking the barb in every speared question hurled at him. It was ecstasy to be so free, so sure; and he no longer was breathing air, but pure elation.

The elation lasted all day and into the evening. It had suffused through his blood to his heart, to his muscles, to his very hair that streamed against his forehead as Bannerman's open car raced south with the celebrants. The elation was in his eyes, a sweet scent in his nostrils, a taste in his mouth that made him want to put his head back and burst into endless laughter. He closed his eyes by glazing them and saw only the mist of cornflowers that grew by the highway, as blue as the eyes of a dense crowd of smiling girls who had lined the road to watch him pass in his triumph.

For five hours that day, almost singlehanded, Ken had given his presentation until Professor Northrop, the unofficial chairman of the group, had finally said, "As far as I can see, nobody here has raised

one single objection to prove that this method can't work. The fact is, Mr. Bannerman, these two boys have shown that they know far more about this than anyone else here. They're the experts, not us!"

The old man had spoken quietly; but to Ken, his voice had had the peal of trumpets pronouncing mightily that Ken was still Ken.

Ken opened his eyes. Margot and Bannerman up front were talking lightly, but their words and laughter were being blown out of the car. Back here, next to him, Vicky and Davy too were talking, but Ken spoke to Davy across their conversation.

"Tell me, Davy, how do you feel?"

Davy laughed. "The way you do."

"Like a damned giant-killer!" Ken murmured, and then shook his head. "Nothing was ever like that. Nothing! Davy, I was on the white horse, I tell you. Christ, I had plumes in my hat! I was — what did Ivanhoe call himself? Do you remember?"

Vicky's body was warm next to his. She turned to answer him, and the wind swept her brown curls fluttering sideways across her head. Her dark eyes were quick with perception, as if she were restlessly trying to guess every shade of feeling behind his words.

"Wasn't it *Desdichado*?" she asked. "I remember that we used to play a dueling game on our block and that was our side's battle cry."

"It meant *the Disinherited*," said Davy.

"Oh, I don't care what it means," said Ken dreamily, settling back and closing his eyes. But he still felt Vicky looking at him. "I was only thinking of the sound."

"I know," she said. "Like thunder far away."

He opened his eyes and looked at her. She had turned away. "Is that the kind of girl you were?"

"I suppose I must have been. What kind do you mean?"

"You know — playing with boys. Were you cute?"

"No," she said, smiling. "I wasn't cute, I was funny."

With his head back, he was very close to her shoulder. He realized that he had never taken a good look at her before.

"You're too pretty to have been funny. Well . . ." He thought about it, idly playing with an impulse to tease her. "You *could* have been funny," he said. "Did you have pigtails?"

"Yes." She looked straight ahead. Her voice was amused and meant only for him.

"Freckles?"

"Only a few."

"Were you glad you were a girl?"

"Sometimes."

"But you wanted to be pretty."

"How do you know?"

"Well, did you want to be ugly?"

"Of course not." She laughed.

"Then there you are. You must have wanted to be pretty." He broke off his lazy tone. "Oh God, Vicky, what was the best day of your life? The very best, happiest, most wonderful day?"

He saw color come into her cheeks. Then finally she turned to look at him just as he had wanted all along; close enough, he thought, for him to kiss. Her eyes were suddenly frank and reckless as if she knew that she could shock him. Interest spurted through him. "Do you honestly want to know? It was the day I found out I was really a girl."

"How did you know?"

"I just looked down—" Her dark eyes still held his for a moment, and he had a quick intuition that she was about to blurt out something on impulse that might torment her with shame for the rest of her life, but she had to give him something precious, if only an intimate confession, that she had never given any other boy before. He saw it all and he watched her steadily, waiting. "I just looked down," she said quietly, "and there I was."

His breath caught for an instant because the confession was a sort of explosion, and now its aftermath—regret was already crowding her eyes, pleading with him to forget, to pretend that he had never heard. She could be made to fall in love with me, he thought with surprise. No, he thought instantly; that's not for me now.

"What I meant was the day you *did* something that came out right," he said, giving her a chance to retrieve her proffered gift as if he hadn't been at all aware of its value.

Her large eyes were depthless for a moment and she ignored the wind that blew her hair so wildly. Then she turned away.

"I never had a day like that," she said. "I never did anything important in my life."

He rested his head against the top of the cushion and then, after a moment, against her shoulder. He looked past her cheek at the twilight clouds.

"Just the same, the day will come and then you'll feel that you're way up there on that big white cloud that's the handle of a sword."

"A sword?" She glanced at the sky. "People say that if you tell what you see in the clouds you show your true character."

"Is that so? Fix your arm, Vicky. I'm joggling all around." He took her hand and raised it over his head, making her embrace him lightly. He knew exactly what he was doing, but he told himself that he wasn't violating his earlier decision. Hell, it was only a party. "Go on. I see a sword handle. What's my true character?"

"I don't know," she said, laughing; and withdrew her hand from his, and then her arm from about his head.

Davy had turned to their murmured conversation. The wind made him narrow his eyes. It gave him the appearance of blinking speechlessly at what he saw. He said, "A fellow I knew in Psychology was telling me that if you get someone to look at a sheet of ink blots —"

Ken was silent, and he didn't move. He sensed that Vicky too was waiting for Davy to finish his oddly strained story. Ken was chagrined that she had withdrawn her arm, even though she was still permitting him to rest against her shoulder. He wished that Davy would finish that damned lecture. And he sounded so funny. What had happened to the kid's voice? Ken said softly to Vicky, "There's a draught on the back of my neck."

"Should we stop and put the top up?"

"Just put your arm back of my head."

"The top will do a better job."

"You don't care if I get pneumonia!"

She laughed. "I'll care," she said. "But first get your pneumonia."

He waited for a moment and then asked gently, "And will that be the second biggest day of your life?" Vicky turned with an abrupt shocked motion. Her cheeks were red, her eyes wide and defenseless. "You don't think I'll ever forget what you said to me, do you, Vicky?" he went on, almost whispering to her. "I know exactly what you felt when you said it, *why* you said it, and what you meant. You never said anything like that to anyone else and you never dreamed you'd say it to me."

"No," she said, still looking at him. "Never."

"But you said it to me."

"Yes."

"And I'll never forget that you did" — he looked directly into her wind-teared expressive eyes — "for the rest of my life," he said, and now he meant it sincerely. "It was just as if you'd kissed me."

She was breathless when she spoke. "You're going much too fast," she said slowly. "It's not right."

"We've got the whole night," he told her, but she let him hold her hand because there was a warm closeness between them now even though they had nothing more to say. And Davy too was silent, staring off into his own distance.

The silence clung to them, making their touch electric when they came together to dance. They seemed to be alone in a nimbus of gypsy music far away from the murmur of beer-garden voices. Sometimes, at the table with the others, they'd find Bannerman and Margot continuing the bantering conversation with Davy their pale and distantly amused audience. Davy looked a little sick, Ken thought, and signaled him to lay off the liquor, but Davy seemed blind.

"The pathetic thing is that you kids are going to grow up without knowing good drinking," said Bannerman. "Now if this Rhine wine is Rhine wine then I'm an Indian princess, and if that lousy beer is beer then I'm the princess's twin. But what the hell — what I'm enjoying is you kids going to be stinking rich while you're still young enough to enjoy it, and I'm going to be young and rich along with you!" He emphasized the point by putting his fist down on the wooden table. "Yes sir! When we started off to have this little celebration, I don't mind telling you I was pretty self-conscious — an old bird like me out with a couple of flappers and collegiate cake-eaters, but when I look at the four of you around this table, why I feel I'm looking in a mirror. A little maudlin, but what the hell, I'm the young in heart, *toujours gai*. Let's dance," he said to Margot. "I'll show you just *how* young. I shake a mean hoof!"

Margot laughed and rose with him. Her face was flushed and she looked pretty, Ken thought. He was proud of her — for her looks and for the way she was being nice to Bannerman. She had a way of getting along with anybody's humor because she had that way of knowing what went on in a fellow's mind. Vicky seemed to have some of that gift too. He turned to her because his hands felt empty now when he wasn't touching her. Their glances met, and for a moment he was content to see in her gaze exactly what he himself was feeling.

Davy's face was white and strained.

"Are you OK, kid?" Ken asked.

"Fine," he said shortly.

"Don't you want to dance, Davy?" Vicky asked him.

At the sound of her voice, he seemed to wonder whether he ought to look at her directly. "You're having a good time, aren't you?"

"I'm having a marvelous time. Just the way you promised I'd have if I stayed. Do you know how nice you were to me that first day?"

"That sounds like a farewell speech," he said slowly.

"It's just the opposite. I'm not going away."

His voice was brusque. "I meant another kind of farewell. You better go dance, you two. The floor's crowding up."

Ken pushed back his chair and Vicky stood with her hands already half raised as if she expected him to take her in his arms then and there, the way he wanted to.

On the way home, Davy insisted on riding in front with Bannerman and Margot. His voice was curt and almost angry when he refused Vicky's invitation to sit in the back with her and Ken. Ken and Vicky had the rear seat and the night all to themselves. Ken put his arm about her and she settled against him. As soon as the car started, he turned to kiss her.

The others in the front were in some outside world whose path, only by accident, accompanied their own, and the snatches of talk that whirled back from time to time were as remote as voices from across a valley.

"The big thing," Bannerman was saying seriously, "is for you boys to get started as soon as possible. Take a thousand dollars tomorrow afternoon, and the deal is off to a flying start. Why in six months, I can see American Radio knocking us senseless with a rain of gold!"

"In the first place —" Davy's voice fled back like shreds from a tattered flag — "Ken and I agree on one thing — we don't want to sell out to anybody, not even to A.R.C. There's one thing to be learned from the record — if you sell out, you're washed up."

"And if you hold out too long, you die an old maid! Would a cool million suit you boys?"

"A million apiece?" Margot asked, and she was serious.

Bannerman burst into laughter, but Ken had felt Vicky's face stir against his, and he was lost to everything else.

When the car stopped at the garage, they were all stiff and tired. Ken and Vicky looked vague and wide-eyed as if they had been awakened from a dream. Bannerman said something about meeting Ken and Davy in Stewart's office the next afternoon, and then Ken started towards the hill with Vicky.

Davy watched Vicky and his brother walk off together, holding hands. Just before they disappeared up the winding path, he saw Ken put his arm about her shoulders and she leaned against him. They were back in the dream again, without even a backward glance to see what had happened to him. After a moment he noticed that Margot was standing by the door waiting for him, smiling a little with her offer of understanding. Davy walked past her with his eyes averted, rejecting the outstretched hand. He didn't want to be touched by anyone's sympathy because he didn't want to admit, even to himself, where his bruise was; or for that matter, now, that there was any hurt at all.

"They make a good-looking couple," he said.

Chapter Four

The August afternoon, even in the shade inside the barn, was so hot that Davy was drenched with sweat. He held the small copper coils gingerly by the flattened tips and then lowered them one at a time into the beaker of brown, fuming, bitter acid. Little bubbles hissed to the liquid surface and the dull metal took on a golden red sheen. Sweat filmed his hands and, as he lifted each coil out of the bath, the acid found a liquid path back to his fingers. The acid bit only slightly, but his fingers were as brown as if they had been swabbed with iodine.

He washed the last coil under water roaring from the big faucet, and turned to see if his soldering irons were hot. Suddenly, though, he was oppressed by the heat of the day, the acrid stench of the acid, and the slowness of the Bunsen flame. Irritation stung at him because the time was close to half past three: the midnight of his nerves these days.

If the afternoons were bad, however, the mornings always started out with clean cool air blowing new hope through the workshop. The newly arrived cartons and cases of equipment looked like stacks of Christmas presents. Optimism was an odor in the morning, like honeysuckle, clover and new-mown hay; and yesterday's failures were

forgotten. Each new today promised to be the one that they would look back on and say — "That was when we really got started."

Most clearly too, at the outset of every working day, Davy could measure within himself the subtle maturing of his work. The driving passion to build ingenious substance out of amorphous nothing was daily being hardened into direct expression. Every new day, he took a fresh sensuous pleasure in the growing intelligence of his flexible fingers.

The sweetness of those first morning moments made the hand go out eagerly for the familiar grip around the wrench, for the slender power of the blowtorch, for the neat delicacy of the wired circuit put down the night before. The working day would spin away as the morning clarity slowly dissolved into a stretch of midday hours barren of time, of everything but rigid heed to the parade of details that demanded answers. After a while, though, the rapt mood was shattered by a sense of impending interruption, and then he glanced at the clock. He was never wrong. The hands of time pointed to half past three.

He would look across at Ken, but Ken always seemed totally absorbed by the roaring torch in his own hand, out of whose flame was spinning the embryo camera tube. Ken's face had the hard soulless immobility of a man wearing goggles, and he could work right up until the moment when the telephone rang at three-thirty. The shrill bell might jangle two or three times while he carefully set down his torch, raised the black goggles to his forehead and wiped his hands on the bathing jersey he wore above his light khaki pants. Only when the receiver was right to his ear would he finally smile and say, "Hi, Vicky."

The moment that the call came, Davy had to walk outside for a cigarette or else deafen himself against his brother's voice until the conversation was over. From that point on, the afternoon slid downhill like an avalanche for Davy, a depthless plunge into hopelessness that was made all the more frustrating by his stubborn refusal to name — even to himself — what it was that he was longing for.

Lately too there would come a sense of despair about the work that was the morning's mood turned inside out. A million unforeseen difficulties plagued them. In the University, such snags had required only patience and time to clear them away. Here, on their own project, besides their time and their patience, they had to spend money. So far they had paid practically no salaries. Their initial outlay had been

only for basic equipment. The first thousand had been spent in three weeks, the second was almost half gone. With horror, Davy was beginning to suspect that they had seriously underestimated the cost of the research, but he said nothing aloud about it. He had no idea of how Ken would take it.

At moments like this in the middle of the afternoon the shadow of impending failure seemed in the air. What he needed, he told himself, was a breath of fresh air and a cigarette. He looked at the clock—twenty-five after three.

He dried his hands on the side of his work pants, but before he could even turn towards the open double doors of the barn, Ken suddenly snapped off his flame and wiped the sweat from his face, pushing the goggles high on top of his pale blond hair.

"We're doing this all wrong, Davy. At least I am." He spoke quietly, but Davy sensed his brother's desperation. "This is my second stab at the camera tube, and I'm telling you right now that it's going to be the second failure."

"Has it cracked?"

"Not yet. But it will. The damn thing's full of strains." He shook his hands in helplessness. "I don't *feel* like building it because I don't have any confidence in it. How do we know the electrode spacing is right? We don't know a damn thing! And don't tell me that we've calculated everything. No amount of calculation is going to keep this tube from going to pieces."

In five minutes Vicky's boss, Mr. Seitz, would retire to the rear of the shop for his afternoon nap, leaving the store and the telephone to Vicky. In seven minutes the telephone was going to ring, but the call could have been a million years away for all the anticipation shown by Ken.

"There's some beer," said Davy. "At least a bottle apiece. Let's knock off for a while. We can talk things over when we finish."

They sat on stools near Davy's bench, drinking the beer and saying nothing. In their thoughtful silence, they both heard the delicate *ping*, as if the most fragile of glass harpstrings had shattered in an empty hall. Davy glanced at Ken, but Ken hadn't moved. His face was only sadder. Then another harpstring in the half-built camera tube sounded its tinkling catastrophe. Ken looked at his beer bottle for a moment and then tipped it up to his lips. Davy put down his bottle, though, and with his eyes still on his brother heard the third sweet sound. Almost immediately after, as if there was no wish to torture them any

longer, there was the dull trashy crash of dissolution. Ken's pale, fine face was haggard as he raised his bottle in salute to his brother.

"Here's to wherever we go from here," he said. "Do I just start all over again?"

"No," said Davy reluctantly. "We've been rushing things. Instead of trying to build a complicated tube like that, first crack out of the box, we should be shooting for a much simpler test model — a mesh photocell with a fixed electron beam playing on the back of the mesh. We'll take current characteristics of the photocell and of the reflected back beam. If there really *is* any correlation between the two, we can go ahead one step at a time to a camera tube."

"That makes sense," Ken admitted slowly. "Why didn't you suggest something like this before?"

"I was hoping against hope, I suppose," said Davy. "And when you think of all the money that's been spent —"

"To hell with the money. We needed money for just this sort of thing."

Davy glanced quickly at his brother. "Do you really mean that about the money, Ken?"

"Of course, why do you have to ask?"

"I just wanted to be sure we felt the same way. I really don't give a damn about the money either. Working on this is an end in itself as far as I'm concerned. I mentioned the money only because I thought it was bothering you."

"Sure, it bothers me. But it's got to be spent. Is that the only reason you didn't talk about the simpler tube?"

"And the time. It may mean months more than we expected."

"Why should we worry about time?"

"Well, I thought you and Vicky —" Davy stopped.

"What about me and Vicky?"

"I didn't know what plans you might have had."

Ken frowned. "What kind of plans would we have? Listen, Davy —!"

The telephone rang but Ken didn't move. He had a lot more to say, but the shrill jangling summoned him again. Reluctantly he rose and answered the call. Davy went out to the open doors of the barn.

The full heat of the day gleamed down on the deserted cobblestones. Trolley tracks shone like straight rivulets of stagnant water. The leaves of trees hung motionless, even those of the eternally shimmering poplars.

"Davy!" He heard Ken's muffled call and turned slowly because he knew that Vicky was asking him a question through Ken. "Vicky's got a girl for you—a blind date—for tonight. We can all drive out to Fox Lake for a swim. OK?"

"No," said Davy.

"Come on, be a sport. We can make more sense once we cool off."

"We're making sense right now. Tell her I'm busy."

"You sure?" Ken was puzzled and a little annoyed.

"I'm sure."

Davy turned back to the street. It hurt too much to see her; so that at moments he hated her. Most of the time now, he disliked her intensely or thought that he did. When he and Ken would call for her in the blue summer evening, he came prepared to hide his feelings behind a brotherly greeting, but the first sight of her happiness was always a shock to him. She was swift and radiant with an inner gaiety. She dressed and walked so differently—even looked so different—from the distant, wistful girl he had met at the station that there seemed no possible connection between the two girls, and yet this is exactly how he had known she would be all along. The expectant way her eyes widened slightly as she looked at Ken coming up the porch stairs, the small happy smile that was deeper than amusement, everything about her said "I love you" so unashamedly to Ken, that Davy's smile of greeting remained only on the surface of his face to become a leaden burden too heavy for his lips to bear. Feeling too tall, too clumsy, he would wait for her to notice him.

The first few weeks of the summer, he had gone out with them from time to time. She and Ken always paired off at once, walking close together and deeply immersed in an interminable conversation they could share with no one. The mysterious conversation stopped abruptly whenever someone else spoke to them, as if they were both patiently waiting for the insensitive interloper to go away. The talk must have been very serious, yet on impulse the gravity could disappear and Davy would see them comparing the lengths of their palms, or matching steps to see who took the biggest stride; and sometimes, when Ken must have teased her, she would chop at his biceps with her fist. Then Ken would laugh and finally say the word of surrender that had been demanded, so then she too laughed in her turn. Clinging affectionately with both hands to the arm she had only a moment before been punishing, on she'd walk again. Davy

sensed that she had so far withheld the utmost intimacy; but he felt no better because he had never seen Ken so deeply involved.

Davy did not enjoy those evenings. He was never at ease with her, and he made the definite decision not to accompany them any more. This was the third date he had refused and, when at last Ken left the telephone and joined him at the barn entrance, Davy could tell that Ken wanted an explanation.

"All right, Davy, don't you like Vicky?"

Davy turned to him with blank eyes. "What makes you think that?"

"Because I'm not Jojo the dog-faced idiot boy. Then there's that remark you made just before the telephone rang."

"I didn't make any remark."

"You damn well implied that she's getting in the way of the research."

"I never said that, Ken."

"You said that you'd known for some time that we were on the wrong track — but you said you didn't want to put it into words because Vicky might resent a delay."

"That's not what I meant. For God's sake, Ken, lay off. You don't know what you're talking about. You're all mixed up."

"You're the one who's all mixed up. For the last couple of weeks you've been acting that way." He hesitated. "Are you angry with me about something?"

Davy looked down at his hands. "No," he said slowly. "You haven't done anything. It's not you."

"Is it Margot?"

"No."

"Then who the hell else is there?"

Davy raised his eyes. "Nobody," he said, and he was determined to believe it. "It's only the work."

"If we take care of that, everything will be OK again?"

"Sure," said Davy, going into the barn again. "Everything."

2

Davy was silent all through supper, and Ken left immediately after they had done the dishes. Outside, the daylight had taken on a thin faded quality, although the sky above was still soft blue. In the west, a long ridge of cloud stretched high over the horizon

as if raised in astonishment above the great golden eye that peered along the rim of the world.

Margot had come home late, drained and pale from the heat downtown. Her high shadowed cheeks seemed more delicate than ever, and her curving lips were compressed. She walked barefooted around the kitchen with her light cotton dress unbuttoned. Finally, she sat down opposite Davy to do some darning.

"Aren't you going out tonight?" he asked.

"No," she said shortly.

He looked at her. His dark face became thoughtful.

"Tell me," he said. "How does it feel to be a pretty girl? I really want to know. All day long men look at you, and you know damn well what they're looking at. Can you *feel* them looking at you?"

She didn't smile, nor did she raise her gray slanting eyes from her work. She brushed back a lock of hair and continued to sew. At the moment she didn't look much older than she had ten years before on the farm.

"Well," she said slowly, "I don't go around feeling *heavy* in places if that's what you mean. I don't feel that any more than you do. How does it feel to be a man?"

"Come on, you know what I mean! A fellow sees a girl on the street. He doesn't spend more than a second as she goes past, but he's taken in her face, her figure — everything."

"Well, what do you think a girl does when she sees a man?"

"You mean to tell me she does the same thing?"

"Why not?"

"You mean to tell me a woman sees right through a man's clothes?"

"Isn't it natural?"

"But with the same thing in mind?" he persisted.

She began to laugh. "Maybe it's less direct, but it comes out the same."

"But what's there for a girl to look at? Besides the face, I mean."

She was amused again. "Everything, I guess. I like a man to stand straight. He doesn't have to have big shoulders and muscles necessarily. And I like a man to have a behind with some shape to it."

"For God's sake, how can you tell?"

"You *look*, that's how. When a man moves around, his pants move with him, just the way a woman's clothes move with her." She saw his open mouth and said reassuringly, "You have a nice behind, Davy, you don't have to worry."

"*All* girls do this?"

"I don't know about all girls. I'm just telling you about me. Don't you know what girls have in their minds? Ken does. Why do you think he gets girls so easily?"

"I never thought about it," he said slowly. "But Ken doesn't know about you and Vollrath."

For the first time, she put her sewing down. "What's there to know?"

"I know *you*. Every time there's been a man, I guess I could tell. And you know I can."

"I suppose so," she admitted. Her gray eyes were thoughtful for a moment. "You don't mind, do you, Davy?"

"Now why should I mind!" he said. "It's just that, well — you're not having much fun."

"He likes me, Davy, he really does, only he doesn't know what to do about it," she said, as if she were gently explaining the antics of a child. "He's all mixed up between what he feels and what he thinks he ought to be feeling. You know how the out-of-town students up at the Hill think of the town girls: a fellow would be a fool to fall for one of us. That's the way Doug *thinks* he feels about me and, I suppose I might as well admit it, he's ashamed to have his friends meet me. But you should see his house, Davy," she went on with wonder. "When people have that much money, they take so many things for granted that they seem a little childish."

"Where is he tonight?"

"At the Country Club — one of the places he doesn't take me. He says that I wouldn't like it. That's what I mean when I say he's mixed up. He doesn't tell me point-blank that I don't belong there. Or say nothing at all. The point is that he *apologizes*, and pretends that he's doing me a favor. As if I wouldn't give ten years just to see the inside of the place!"

"Hey, wait a minute, you don't really want to mix with the Bettingers, the Brocks and the Quigleys, do you? They're stuffed shirts."

"I suppose so," she admitted with a sigh. "But what expensive shirts they have to be stuffed in!"

The telephone rang, and Margot went into the darkness of the workshop to answer it. In a few minutes, she came hurrying back with all her weariness gone. She was smiling.

"He's going to call for me!" she said.

"Is he taking you out there?"

"No. He just called from there. He's going home. He'll be by here

in about ten minutes. Davy, get me some water, will you? I've got to take a quick bath. I suppose somebody must have walked out on him at the last minute. You know, one day that boy is going to get the surprise of his young happy life, and that surprise is going to be me!"

When she was ready in the one good white summer dress she owned, she had a soft radiance in which she was so bemused that she didn't notice that Davy too had changed his clothes. He had on a white clean shirt and fresh khaki pants. His hair was combed and wet, and he was neatly rolling up his sleeves. The dusk had become deep blue, but no light was turned on in the kitchen. The deep, many-toned horn sounded outside, and Margot whirled in the darkness for one last glance about her to see if she had forgotten anything. But the motion was pure habit for she was blind with nervousness. At the door, she paused for a moment, struck by conscience.

"Oh, Davy, you know I'd ask you to come along—"

"Beat it," he told her, smiling slightly. "I'm going out myself."

When she had gone, silence settled down like crows flapping back one by one to the tree from which they had been frightened. With the silence came loneliness; and for the first time in his life he felt important to no one. He slammed out of the kitchen. An open trolley came sailing down the tracks like a galleon and he got aboard. The car swayed along as the night air poured through.

Page Park was on the downtown lake front, the end of the line. Glowing dots of light marked the curving paths. The bandstand was dark, and in the rolling rectangular meadow that was the park's center, the statue of Colonel Zachary Armstrong raised his brazen fist against the ghosts of the Black Hawk War, but he threatened only the bronze drummer boy a quarter of a mile away who had been marching towards him since 1871. In the west, across the cobalt-colored lake, the sky had become dark red above the black Wisconsin shore; and high above, the tiny lights of a billion Page Parks twinkled down to the self-illusioned pale smudges in summer dresses and open shirts that they were already strolling in as much of heaven as there ever would be for anybody.

Near the ice-cream wagon, Davy met a fellow he used to know, one of the connoisseurs of the park, who told Davy to stick around and maybe they'd find two worth the trouble.

Davy shook his head. "The kind I'm looking for doesn't go around in twos. She'll be all by herself."

He thought he had found her on a bench near the water, with her

hands in her lap, her ankles crossed primly. He walked past her once, and noticed that her face seemed a delicate pale silver framed in pale golden hair. But when he sat next to her, wondering what he ought to say to start things, she turned out to be a girl he used to know when she was thirteen, living half a mile down the street from him. She wasn't too pleased to see him at first, but then when she resigned herself to the probability that her own handsome stranger was not going to come marching out of the mysterious night, at least not tonight, she began to talk about people Davy had forgotten or never knew. She spoke of the gang at high school, still remembering those flawless days, just as if Davy had been one of the Bunch. She didn't even know that he had gone to the Hill in the five years since she had moved away, and he didn't tell her.

He kept shutting his ears to her talk. He put his arm about her small shoulders and she leaned towards him stiffly, still talking to the lake and the black night that had finally settled down. When she had said all she had to say, she relaxed softly against him, still and receptive, and became beautiful again with the magic glow of the girl who would be sitting all alone.

The next morning, clean cool air blew new hope through the workshop from the fields of sunshine outside. The memory of yesterday's failures was forgotten and optimism was an odor as sweet as honeysuckle, clover and the new-mown hay. Today promised to be the one to which he and Ken would look back and say—"That was when we really got started."

3

Two months later, on an evening in October, Margot stood alone in the large living room of Vollrath's house, watching the blue twilight. The room was almost in darkness, so that her slanting eyes and fragile hollow cheeks seemed delicate and brooding. At this time of day, the northern autumn had a blue sad beauty as if such colors as red, gold and green were never going to be seen again on the face of the earth, and as if she alone had been burdened with the secret that no human being would ever smile in the perpetual night that was coming so fast. The sorrowful knowledge showed on her face so that she looked wise with a timeless compassion.

Forty feet away, in the bright and sparkling kitchen, Arthur, the

white-jacketed butler, brought on from New York, was preparing cocktails. Upstairs, directly over her head, Doug was getting into fresh clothes. Outside, black leaves whirled a frenzied stabbing dance, and the Canadian wind slatted against the windows to answer the crackling fire on the hearth behind her—the only light in the room. She had not turned on the lamps, pretending to herself that she preferred half darkness. Even though she had been coming here for months, she was still intimidated by the house. She had no right to touch the furniture, and the furniture seemed to know it.

Yet, if she didn't belong here, she belonged nowhere else in the world, for whenever she left Vollrath and returned to her own familiar life, she felt as if she had closed her eyes and was holding her breath during a deep plunge through brackish water, waiting only for the moment when sunlight would touch her face again. But there was no sunlight; for when she was with him, particularly in his house, she suffered continual torment behind her light-hearted poise. When he touched her shoulder with careless affection or when he held her tightly with his large hands, she was amazed that he never seemed to sense the panic that simmered beneath the desire he so easily aroused. She felt that she was always on guard against blurting out—"What can somebody like you possibly see in me? Compared to the girls you've had, I'm so ugly, scrawny and plain. Ah, you must be laughing at me!"

She was always trapped by surprise when she caught a glimpse of her face in one of the mirrors of his house; for instead of being pale, wide-eyed and frightened, she saw her amused smile, her radiant gray eyes, the vivacity in every gesture she made. When she despised herself for a hypocrite—when she felt driven to tear off the mask and confess her unworthiness, she found that the smile and the happiness were truly genuine; she couldn't rub them off if she wanted to. She was in love, deeply in love; and except for that small, fearfully watchful inner eye, she was having a marvelous time.

Ice, glass and silver tinkled in the next room, and the butler's tray was finished. She crossed the wide, pelt-covered floor and turned on the lights so that the servant wouldn't have to stumble. Butlers had always been a sort of joke to her, a silly make-believe among the legendary rich. She had never told Ken and Davy that Vollrath had a real honest-to-God butler because they would have expected her to laugh about it. But there was nothing funny about Arthur. At moments like this, his efficiency, skill and silence crushed her. Be-

hind his bland workman's face, she imagined him wanting to say to her in a low voice, "Your dress is cheap and all wrong, your make-up is a joke, but we know you've never been to New York or Hollywood, and nobody expects miracles. You'd be laughing yourself if you could see what you look like compared with what's right."

The Hollywood photographs up in Doug's bedroom were not the glossy pictures of stars anybody could get by sending ten cents and stamps to some studio. His pictures were ordinary amateur snapshots — of himself and Norma Shearer standing against a privet hedge, himself and Rod La Roque squinting against the sun. Then there was that big beach party of Alice Terry's, where fifteen young men and women stood in a line with the sheepish self-consciousness of ordinary people, except that these faces were so famous that the informality of the picture enhanced their glamour a thousandfold. At the far right was John Gilbert and at the far left, next to Vilma Banky, was Doug Vollrath, looking very boyish, thin and young because he was the only one there who was scowling.

"Did you take *her* to the party?" Margot had once asked, pointing to Banky, her voice sounding very small because of her attempt to be casual. Doug had raised himself on an elbow to point to another beautiful face.

"She's the one I went with. That was when she was working for me in *Prince of Venice*."

"For *you*?" Margot had stared at him. "Did you make that picture?"

"I made two," he had said lying back and staring at the ceiling. "The minute I met Tommy Winfield, I sized him up as the man to build a studio around. Neither of us had ever made a movie but it didn't seem too complicated. *Venice* was a flop, but we certainly broke the bank with *Carnival*."

"You made *Carnival*?"

"Christ, my name was all over it." He had laughed softly. "I was a big joke out there at first. Behind my back they called me Little Lord Goldenbags. Hell, I was only twenty-two — a snotty twenty-two, I suppose — but they stopped laughing. Listen, Tom would be the biggest producer out there right now if he hadn't become a rummy after I left."

"I remember *Prince of Venice*," Margot had said slowly, so full of the memory of splendor that she still failed to notice that the story of the director's fall was beginning to sound familiar. All the men with whom Doug had been closely associated seemed somehow to go to

smash after the withdrawal of his support; he made the world sound as if it were full of fragile people — with no hint at all of any awareness that he himself might be in any way responsible for the wake of human debris that marked his path. The glory of his presence so overwhelmed her that she would have denied the insight even if it had flashed upon her. To Margot, he was perfect and powerful; and still bemused, she had gone on: "God, how I loved it! That was the one about —"

Doug had laughed. "Hey, don't start telling *me* the story. I made it." He had suddenly turned his head and looked at her with changed interest. "And they said ordinary people wouldn't understand it!"

But it had made no difference because she loved him so.

The tinkling tray and Arthur came discreetly into the living room. A moment later, Doug hurried down the broad stairs, fresh and smiling in the way she loved to see him, and her trepidation vanished. At the foot of the staircase, adjusting his white cuffs, he looked strong, stocky and clean. He rubbed his hands because he was pleased.

"Don't set a third place for dinner, Arthur," he said. "I'm sorry but there was a mix-up. Mr. Thorne will be along later."

"Did Mr. Thorne have a pleasant trip out?" Arthur asked.

"It couldn't have been pleasant if he had to take the train," Doug said, laughing. He turned to Margot. "I never saw a man so crazy to fly. He was the best of our outfit. On the ground he's nobody at all, but get him in the air, even talking about flight, and he's inspired. Things are really going to start moving out at the plant now. Arthur, Miss Mallory and I are starved."

She had never described the dining room to Ken and Davy because she could never bring herself to tell them about the food here. Her brothers had never seen oysters, much less tasted them fat and cold in Arthur's sauce that suggested ten different sharp tangs. Nor was there any way to tell them how delicate a clear soup could be. And when it came to steak, as tender as butter, pink as a flower and two inches thick — the only steak they had ever known was as thin as paper.

"The boys are doing marvelously," she said aloud to Doug. She spoke quietly but it was her statement of where her loyalty belonged.

"That's great," he said. The absent dismissal made her raise her eyes to him with suppressed anger. But his voice went on. "Margot, why don't you give up your job at the store to come work for me? I've never yet had a secretary that made sense. You'd be fine."

She felt such relief and pleasure that she could have cried. It wasn't that Doug was callous or even thoughtless. She told herself that she had to keep thinking of him as if he were blind. Right behind his eyes, he must have small mirrors reflecting inward so that he could never see anything but himself, except when he made the deliberate effort to peer outside at the real world. To lose her temper with him, to scold, would be as senseless as giving him everything he wanted the moment he asked for it.

"I'll have to think about it," she said slowly, looking down at her coffee.

"What's there to think about?"

"Well, I like the store, and I've got a future there."

He compressed his lips. "What's the matter with a future with me? I've got forty good years ahead of me."

"I don't have to give you an answer now, do I?"

"I can't imagine why not." He rose abruptly from the table. "I'll give you twice what you're getting now."

"It's not the money."

"Then what is it?"

"I don't know. If I knew I'd give you an answer."

"Your answer is that you don't give a good God damn about me," he said in anger. "All I am to you is just a good time. All right, I'll give you your good time. Come on upstairs."

"Thanks," she said coldly, without moving. "I'm not in the mood for that kind of good time."

"Damn it, what are *you* angry about? I'm the one who was turned down."

"I didn't turn you down."

"You didn't say yes."

"And now I *can't* say it," she shot back at him. "Not even if I wanted to."

"Margot," he said contritely. "Look, I'm sorry. Just think it over, that's all. Come on, what do you say?"

She said nothing.

"Please. I'm saying 'please.' Before Thorne gets here. And I need your measurements for some clothes I want you to have."

"Thanks, but I like my own clothes."

"These will be better ones."

"I can't afford them."

"Oh Christ, pay me back out of your salary. Please."

She looked up and saw him without the Hollywood photographs, without the big house, the servant, the car, his food — a stocky clean man with pleading, apologetic gray eyes. She smiled a little and loved him with all her heart.

"You're a boob," she said softly. "All right."

When they came downstairs, Thorne was waiting for them. He stood up with an uncertain expression as they entered the living room, a tall, thin man of about forty, with black hair and a black pencil line of a mustache on a red hollow-cheeked face. His tight skin was bumpy and scarred as if it had once been lashed to a pulp. Dark rings of sickness made his cavernous eyes seem enormous. Except for his hands, which were as large as a manual laborer's, he looked like a worn-out dancing master because of his shiny, tight-fitting suit of blue serge that seemed foreign-made.

"Hello, bird-man!" Doug said loudly, taking his hand and holding it. "Margot, this is Melvin Giles Thorne, Chief Engineer of Vollrath Aviation and the very reason for its being. Mel learned to fly as a kid sixteen years ago with the Wrights in Paris and Santos Dumont. One of the first to join the Escadrille and he taught us all." Doug gave Thorne's hand an extra squeeze before releasing it, and then put an arm about his shoulders. "Mel, this is Miss Mallory, who is thinking about becoming my secretary."

"Hello, Miss Mallory, don't you believe this joker here. I was only twenty-three when I went across with Wilbur. As for Santos Dumont, I was his mechanic for just a couple of weeks when the Wrights laid me off as a lesson. Wilbur was as strict as a church deacon, you know."

He had a homely Midwest voice and he was shy. In a house like this, he didn't know what to do with his hands, and she found herself hoping desperately that Doug would treat him well, particularly because he seemed so sick. But she wondered how he could have lived so long in a place like France without being touched by it. The local boys who were veterans were still talking about Gay Paree.

"Sit down, Mel, I want you to take things easy for a while," Doug said. "I finally got things into shape here the way I think you'd want them."

"The way *I'd* want them!"

"Of course the way you want them! Why do you think I bought a plant out in this Godforsaken place? You're the fellow I'm backing to make American aviation begin to match up to the rest of the world."

Thorne laughed again in embarrassment. His face turned dark red.

"Well, listen, if I thought it was going to work out like that, I could have told you about a dozen others, twice as big."

Doug shook his head. "No," he said. "This is what you picked for your size before you even knew I was interested. And this is where you start. If you've got what I *know* you've got, we'll go up on the Big Board in eighteen months, and eighteen months after that we'll be bigger than Wright! You're my skyrocket, Mel, and we'll take that big ride together. First thing, though, I want you to move out of that room you say you've taken. There's another house on the property here. That's for you. For the next year or so, you and I are going to live in each other's pockets and think each other's thoughts. I've already written East for a man as good as Arthur."

"Hey, wait a minute!" Thorne put down his drink. His eyes had a feverish sparkle. "I wouldn't know what to do with a valet. You know that officer-gentleman stuff was OK during *la guerre*, but that's not really my speed."

"Then I'll get you a woman to come in," Doug said. "Look, kid, you might as well start living up to your future income. That's important. You may be a few years older than I am, but I'm the boy who can tell you about money. You've got to wear it. The more you have, the more unobtrusively you have to wear it, but that golden button has got to be somewhere on your lapel — in plain sight."

Doug went on with his advice. Margot watched the expression on Thorne's lacerated face, and guessed at his delicious sensation of walking in a newly acquired garden where a golden mist shimmered in the air. There was no need to grab. All he had to do was to breathe in the perfume, because sooner or later the mist was going to settle down into sparkling dew for him to gather at will.

The talk turned to the plant, about which he asked many questions, and then to the early days of flying before the war. Thorne was no longer a sick man, but someone with an inner authority. Margot could see that Doug had finally removed the mirrors in his own eyes. This was the first time she had ever seen him treat a man as his equal.

Thorne was saying, "Things have gone so fast in the past ten or fifteen years, you can hardly remember how they used to be. The first plane I ever flew was only twelve years ago — a canoe with wings. All canvas, a fuselage like a box kite, a chain-drive propeller. In those days nobody knew how to get out of a spin — nobody really knew what made the damn things fly. You were up there balancing

yourself on top of a greasy ball. Listen, I remember when the Gnome engine spun around with the prop and the shaft was stationary. The idea was to increase air-cooling and cut out the extra weight of a fly-wheel. It wasn't until only eight or nine years back that they nailed down the engine and spun the shaft." For all his seriousness he was more than a little drunk. "Those French! Best automobiles, best planes, best aviators! We got to catch up with them all right. Right, boss?"

"Right as rain, Mel."

"Then take me home. I'm still too weak on my pins to drink anything stronger than milk. If Wilbur saw me this way, he'd fire me sure."

The three of them went out into the frozen night. Margot wore Doug's big raccoon coat that was as soft and luxurious as silken sheets. The stars were so hard that the slatting wind only brushed up their brilliance. Doug drove fast, and they all cowered low in the dim light of the dash. Margot felt Thorne shivering against her on one side, huddling to her like a child. Doug had a rocklike solidity on her left. She found herself leaning against Doug, away from Thorne. Her pity for him was now tinged with slight revulsion, for he had a gritty seediness in his sickness. They dropped him in front of the small rooming house on Cherokee Street, and then sped across town to the dark garage. She gave the fur coat back to Doug and he tossed it carelessly into the rear.

"Well, what have you decided?" he asked. His arm hugged her as she stood shivering next to the car.

"I'll take the job," she said. "But there's one condition—as long as I'm working for you as your secretary, that's what I'll be to you. Nothing else."

He looked up at her incredulously. "What do you mean?"

"What I said. The money makes it different."

He laughed angrily. "Oh, you're crazy!"

"No," she said slowly, and smiled. "That's one thing I'm not."

"You'll never hold out."

"I will. I'll bet you I will."

"That's a bet, baby. Start tomorrow."

"No. Monday."

"Monday then." His anger softened and he looked very puzzled. "Are you kidding me?"

She bent down and kissed him with all her love and all the tender-

ness she was so sure he didn't really want from her. She withdrew from the long kiss and looked searchingly into his strong square face. She found nothing but angry bewilderment. "I wouldn't kid you for the world, Mister," she said, as she straightened up.

4

Doug called for her on Monday morning, a bleak day with the scent of withheld snow in the air. Ken and Davy were already at work. Doug stood just within the side doorway. The three men were ignoring each other politely. As Margot walked towards him, she tried to see the appearance of her brothers' work through Doug's eyes, but this was one of the days when everything had been torn down again so that there was no finished construction to be seen — nothing but odd shapes of glass, masses of confused-looking electrical equipment, tangles of copper tubing and banks of storage batteries. The place was a mess and so, on the ride out to the plant, she said nothing about their project.

The plant was a disappointment to her after the tidiness of the department store. The building was an enormous one-story shell — draughty and cold. One half of the floor was full of shrieking machinery; the other half was empty except for four airplanes that seemed surprisingly small. Several radial engines hung in sling hoists, and three fuselages under construction lay along the floor like the broken bodies of great insects. The offices were open-topped cubicle cells with plywood walls. No matter where one went, the voices of men, their deep laughter and gritty footsteps on cement, came flooding over the keening whine and clatter of machinery.

There wasn't, at first, even any sense of accomplishment, because she quickly learned that the four new planes she had seen had been made by competing firms, bought only to be studied, taken apart either to be copied or improved upon.

However, she soon found that there was plenty of work to be done in regularizing procedures. She had to invent a unified office routine out of chaos, and at the same time maintain Doug's correspondence with his New York office, with his securities broker, with his Doyleville Oil & Gas Company of Doyleville, Texas, with the Vollrath Refineries in Oklahoma City, with the Nitro Corporation of Norfolk, and with the United States Department of Internal Revenue through

the law firm of Whittaker, Challis and Bowles, on why the corporation known as Permanent Pictures of Culver City, California, a Vollrath Corporation subsidiary, wholly owned, was still an entity when for the past two years no motion pictures had been produced. As far as investment was concerned, she saw that his new aviation project was the very least of his interests, but nevertheless Wickersham was where he was staying.

Three weeks after Mel Thorne finally reported on the job, Doug had to go East to New York. He planned to take Margot with him, but at the last minute changed his mind and decided that she ought to remain behind and give Thorne a hand. Thorne gradually lost some of his shakiness. When she was alone with him, she knew from the sidelong way he studied her that he was debating whether or not she really was the boss's girl. But he was too busy to come to any conclusion, and too tired at the end of the day to have acted on one. Sooner or later though, she knew, he was going either to say something or to put a hand on her.

Late in the afternoon of the day of Doug's return, Doug said that she was to go home with him for dinner; but he spoiled the casualness of the request by too often insisting that he had only business to discuss with her. A month had passed since they had been together on intimate terms, and in that time he had made no overtures to her, as if determined to make her break her own promise without the slightest encouragement from him.

That evening he was nervous and irritable. He drank rather heavily, and not once did he meet her gaze directly. She caught the tension of his strain and wondered how long he could stand it. About ten o'clock, he threw the pile of papers to the floor and pulled her to him.

"When are you going to stop this damned nonsense?" he demanded. His face was flushed. His expression told her plainly what he intended, and so she made no resistance beyond saying, "All right, but remember — I'm going back to the store!"

He released her at once, looking so ludicrous in his frustration that while she could have laughed, her heart snapped with pity for him and contempt of herself. What a cheap trick she was playing on him, she thought; and all because she knew that he would never ask her to marry him unless he was tormented beyond bearing. She wanted desperately to be his wife, to have his children, to possess him in his moments of unhappiness; yet she knew that as soon as he was sure

again that he could have her, he would no longer want her except as a convenience. Nevertheless, her feeling for him drove her beyond the cold calculation which she herself despised. Her warm gray eyes were abject and full of contrition as she went to him.

Before she went home, he showed her the three dresses he had brought back from New York for her. She had a sensuous pleasure in putting them on; not only because of their dream-fulfilling beauty, but because of the way Doug was watching her. His eyes shone with pride.

"Why don't you stay all night?" he said. "It's miserable out."

"It's not that miserable," she said. "I'll take a cab if you're too tired. By the way, I'll deduct ten dollars a week from my salary for these. How much were they?"

"Ten dollars for the three. I got them at a sale."

She just looked at him.

"All right," he said. "Ten dollars apiece. For God's sake, Margot! Oh, hell, say twenty apiece."

"A hundred is more like it."

"Make it a hundred for the three." As soon as she nodded, he said, "And give yourself a ten-dollar raise."

She threw down the dresses. "I'm going back to the store."

"Damn it, can't you take a joke?" he said. He put his arms about her. "Margot, why the hell do you insist on torturing me?"

She rubbed her cheek slowly against his and pressed him tightly to her. "If I didn't torture you, you'd torture me. And since I'm nicer than you, I don't hurt you half as much as you'd hurt me."

However, it was one of the dresses, the red one that made her face glow with reflected color, that finally caught Ken's attention. On Christmas Eve, they were getting ready to go up to the Wallis's. Davy had gone already. Ken was standing in the kitchen, looking very clean and neat in a fresh shirt and pressed trousers. His hair was combed smooth to the sheen of burnished bronze, and his drawn face was beautifully shaven. Margot came out of her room to be hooked, feeling the dress swirl about her like the caress of a hundred delicate hands, when she saw his expression. Ken's eyes had a cold and brilliant glitter, and his nostrils seemed pinched.

"Where'd you get that?" he asked slowly. "You didn't make it."

"I got it in a store." She raised her arm for him to get at the hooks.

"No store in Wickersham."

"New York," she said.

"I know New York, but you weren't in New York."

"But Doug Vollrath was. He got them, and I'm paying him back."

"With what?" he demanded bitterly.

"With money," she retorted.

"And what else?"

She looked up at him steadily. Ken's face seemed to shrink. He sat down at the table and stared at his clasped hands. Several times, he started to raise his eyes to her, but he was never able to complete that smallest, most challenging motion.

"Is he going to marry you?" he asked in the same dazed voice that was really a whisper.

"He hasn't said so. I doubt if he will."

"Is he the only one?"

"The only one — now."

"But he wasn't the first?"

"He wasn't the first," she said in the same quiet voice.

"And the others? Do I know them?" He waited a long time. "Was it Chuck?"

"I won't answer that kind of question, Ken!"

"And Bob?"

"I won't tell you either way."

"Doc?"

"I won't tell you."

"I hate that bastard, Doc," he said pensively. "I always did."

"Do you hate me, Ken?" She sat opposite him, but he still couldn't look at her. He looked at his clasped hands as the seconds ticked away.

"I don't hate you, but I could kill you," he said huskily.

"Why?" she persisted. "After all, I'm twenty-five. And in a lot of ways, I'm much older. If I can't do what I want now, when can I?"

"Stop *talking!*" He left the table with a gesture of wretchedness. "What do you think you're trying to explain? You're my sister, aren't you?"

"And you're my brother. Did I ever say anything to you about *your* girls?"

"That's different."

"It's not, and you know it. Did you ever think any less of them because they loved you?"

"Love!"

"Yes, love. I loved every man I went with, just the way those girls loved you. And you loved them too while you were with them."

"And the next minute it was over."

"That's *your* hard luck, not theirs." Suddenly, through the calm, she burst into tears of hopelessness for ever having allowed herself to believe that she could push Doug into a marriage she was sure he would never regret, of contempt for herself for deliberately playing a role she despised. She let herself go completely now, letting the heartbroken sobs shake out of her body the hard stones of misery so deeply embedded there.

She had never before permitted her brothers to see her in tears, because she had wanted them to believe that they could always call on her courage for protection. There had never been anyone to protect her, though, and so she wept for herself too, for the poor starry-eyed little girl in the pongee coat who had ridden so happily with her parents on a Pullman train, never dreaming of the life in store for her.

She felt Ken was trying to hook her dress. He knelt beside her, leaning his forehead against her throat.

"Baby, stop crying, for God's sake," he murmured. "It kills me to see you cry. You know the way I feel about you. You're my mother and sister in one. I don't care who you go with, just don't cry."

She couldn't stop herself, though; she had no experience with tears. She was the prisoner of her sobbing body even though a tiny corner of her mind was laughing because every time Ken closed two hooks, her convulsive gasping snapped them open again.

"I didn't mean it," he went on. "It's only that Davy and I are almost three quarters through with the money and not a damn thing yet to show for it. We keep getting those letters from Bannerman, as if he were some kind of cheerleader whooping us on. Sit up, baby," he said, raising her head to wipe her eyes with his clean handkerchief. "Come on, pull yourself together. You're the only girl I ever gave a damn about."

Through her tears, she saw his concerned face, and frightened loving eyes.

"Hook me up, Ken," she said and then added with a weak laugh — as I said before."

He laughed quietly with her. "Vicky and Davy will be worrying."

"She's a wonderful girl, Ken. I'm crazy about her."

He said nothing, intent on his task. She washed her face with cold water, and then powdered her cheeks up to her eyes. She put her coat on her shoulders and Ken loaded her arms with boxes and presents.

"Go along," he said. "I'll follow you when I straighten up around here."

She leaned forward over the bulky load and kissed his cheek. "You all right, Ken?"

"Fine," he said gently. "Beat it."

She went through the door into the winter darkness and started towards the hill, but the memory of his calm disturbed her. It was as unusual for him under the circumstances as her tears had been for her. She glanced back through one of the windows and saw him pacing up and down. She saw him stop to pick up a cup from the table, already set for tomorrow's breakfast. He held the cup as if he were examining it for flaws. Then, abruptly, he hurled it to the floor. She wondered whether she ought to go back in to him. Then she decided that she'd better go ahead and let him find his way himself. She supposed, sadly, that would be the only way.



The following week marked the new year, and progress on the beam tube spurted forward. Ken threw himself into the work with a silent self-punishing ferocity that Davy found hard to match. Ken's day ended when Margot came in. He would wait until she had gone to bed before putting down his work to retire to his own room. His silence was bitter and driven. When he found one avenue of progress temporarily stopped because some tool or piece of equipment had not yet arrived, he started another project going.

Vicky fell into the habit of coming down to the workshop at night. At first, she merely visited, and then, to keep her hands busy, she took over simple jobs of buffing, drilling and polishing when Davy showed her what to do. She wore a machinist's apron with a faded *Sapolio* written across it, and she dug up Ken's old freshman cap to protect her short curls. The cap became "her cap" and she was unable to work unless she had it on the back of her head. She loved to talk while she worked at the vise, filing a beveled edge on a condenser plate with the care of a manicurist doing her lover's hands, stopping every so often to stare herself out of a reverie and inspect her progress.

"I just finished a wonderful book today," she would announce.

At the store, she read Theodore Dreiser, Warwick Deeping, Zane Grey, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Warner Fabian, Michael Arlen, Sinclair Lewis, Rafael Sabatini and John Dos Passos.

"It was very interesting—" was the way she would begin, as she tucked her skirt beneath her to climb on a work stool. She kept the files—*her* files—in a chamois kit, and she started each evening's chore by cleaning them with a wire brush. "There was this fellow—" or this woman, this count, this ranger, this man of the world or this boss. Anyhow, this character would meet another character and the story would start. She was so carried away that, without being at all aware of it, she entered the world her characters inhabited. Once, in telling a story of Fitzgerald's about some fabulously rich people, she referred to a social error committed by one of the characters.

"Of course," Davy said, letting his soldering iron sizzle in a little pool of flux. "How could anybody be so dumb!"

She stared at him for a moment and then laughed. "Well, all right, don't you want to hear it?"

"Sure, I want to know what happens. Don't you, Ken? Ken—don't you?"

"Wasn't listening."

Davy caught Vicky's glance at Ken's averted face. Her head was a little to one side and her eyes had the dark puzzled look of a child whose best friend has suddenly joined the tormentors.

"Go on," said Davy. The globule of flux ran like water and the drop of solder beneath gleamed on the wire joint. Davy pulled on the wire to test the strength of the bond. "She went to his house . . ."

Vicky turned to him blankly. Then she picked up her emery cloth and allowed herself to slide back into the story again. "Well, she saw the picture, and then very foolishly . . ."

Jean Christophe was so absorbing that she did no work at all. She sat on the stool, enthralled, night after night. She had a habit, Davy noticed, of running her fingers gently through her hair, pushing the ends back over her ear and then patting them into place in an interminable caress he could have watched forever. Her exposed ear was small and well-formed. He thought the delicate skin must have a perfume all its own. Sometimes when he had to reach across her for a tool or a piece of wire, he would stand, as if by accident, as close as he possibly could to see if he could catch some hint of that special fragrance reserved only for someone she loved. He could watch her with a somber pleasure that lost its tinge of sadness only

when she would glance up to meet his eyes. And at such moments, he felt a surge of sweet terror as if she might see through him to a secret truth that he himself denied.

"Did you ever read this?" she asked Davy when she was half through *Christophe*. She hadn't seen him at all, then, he realized. She had only been looking at a friend.

"A long time ago."

"Did you like it?"

"Sure."

"Because he made you feel he was writing about you?" He glanced up quickly. "Don't look so guilty," she said. Then she went on. "I don't think I ever really understood the way you felt about your work until I began to read this."

"Oh, I know what Christophe was feeling," he admitted slowly. "But people don't usually think a man can feel about engineering in the same way that composers do about music."

"But the truth is that you really do," she insisted.

"Yes," he said after a moment. "You really do!"

"Ken?"

"What?"

"Did *you* ever read this book?"

"What book?"

"I told you three times. *Jean Christophe*."

Ken took the rubber blowpipe out of his mouth. "When do I have time to read?" he demanded. "Someone's got to work around here while you and Davy jabber every night about books. Hell, this is a workshop, not a course in Mod Lit."

Her lips tightened.

"What's Mod Lit?" she asked, turning to Davy.

"Modern Literature," he explained, with his eyes on Ken.

"Here we are only three quarters of the way to even the crudest kind of camera tube — none of the circuits are ready, and only three hundred dollars left!" He slammed the torch onto its wall hook and looked about him with desperation. "And it's all a big joke. *Jean Christophe*! Why do I have to read about him and his music? I've got Kenneth Mallory and *his* problems."

"All right, Ken, take it easy —" Davy said.

"Easy, my eye! I'm going out." He marched to the rear and returned almost immediately with an old plaid Mackinaw. "I'm going for a

ride — by myself. If Margot comes in, which she won't, tell her I'll be back in an hour or so. Davy will take you home."

"Thanks," she said. "I'll take myself home."

She and Davy stood in silence, listening to the engine start outside with a roar and then die away in the distance. Davy kept his eyes averted.

"It's nothing," he said. "He always blows up when he's been working too hard."

"No." Her voice was dead. "It's not that. And it's not the way the work is going, or even the money."

"Only about ninety-nine per cent of it."

"No, it isn't," she insisted quietly. "It's me. He doesn't like me any more."

"That's not true," Davy said without conviction. "Bannerman's coming next week. He's given us three thousand dollars so far and it's all been spent. According to our guess last summer, we should have been nearly finished by now, and it's just as if we hadn't even started. I don't think that Bannerman is going to give us any more. He hasn't said so, but he just hasn't come through when we've asked for the rest of the money. What have we got to show him in the way of results to encourage him? Ken's got no reason to like *anybody* these days."

She shook her head. "He doesn't even talk to me about it. He used to — all the time."

"What's there to talk about? You're here. You see what's going on."

"Does he have another girl?" she asked abruptly.

"Now, when would he have time for another girl? We've been working every day and every night. Use your brains, Vickyl!"

"If he did have, I can't say I could blame him. Oh, what's the use of reading books," she said with a despair that smashed through reticence. "In books, girls do it all the time and you're supposed to understand that nothing bad happened, and I would — I would now, really, except that he doesn't even care enough to ask me since we had that fight."

He watched her as if the blood were slowly draining out of him. There had been no desire in her voice, nor any passion other than unhappiness; but she had cried out her permission, and that alone made her seem suddenly accessible to longings he had never permitted himself so far. He lowered his gaze again to hide his heartbroken anger.

"What fight?" he asked dully.

"Just after Christmas," she replied. "It was very late, and I—I just couldn't go through with it. Oh I wanted to," she said with quiet agony. "I know about all his other girls, but I just couldn't, that's all. He was angry and ashamed and I know how he felt. I felt the same way. I was so mixed up—"

"Will you stop talking about it!"

Her face went white at his tone. She tried to speak, but she only stammered. "I wouldn't talk this way to anyone but you, Davy. I'd be ashamed—even to Margot."

"What do you want me to do?" he demanded in torment. "Do you expect me to tell him that you've changed your mind?"

She sat very still, looking at him with eyes full of a hurt that was too proud to put itself into words, a hurt so deep and innocent that he wondered uneasily whether he had correctly understood her original meaning. Yet, she *had* said it. She had spoken straight from her heart; but apparently she hadn't listened with a man's ears and so to herself she was the same girl she had been before she had spoken.

She got up from the stool and looked about her for the book. She carefully marked her place, but her movements had the slow vagueness of the blind. Davy was mute with guilt. He knew exactly what she was feeling, but he couldn't move the few steps towards her. He waited until she went past him, and then he caught her.

"Vicky," he said gently. The top of her head was level with his lips.

"Let me go." There were tears in her voice. "It's late."

"Not that late. Look at me, Vicky." He raised her face. "Don't be sore."

"You're so stupid!"

"And so are you," he said quietly. He smiled a little. "Come on, sock me once. Hard."

She tried to wrench herself from his grasp.

"I mean it," he insisted. "With all your might."

She freed herself with a sudden twist, and with a boyish, stiff-wristed accuracy, drove her fist hard against his chest. Her face was firm and her lips were tight, but then the expression dissolved into surprise when the punch went home. She began to laugh very shakily and her eyes were full of tears.

"There!" she said.

He rubbed his chest because she had really hurt him. He wasn't smiling any more.

"All right!" he said. "We're even. Do you want to take the trolley downtown and get a soda?"

"Let's walk. It's nice and cold."

He watched her getting into her coat, wistfully seeing the freedom of her easy movements, the clean line of her throat. He felt a nameless oppression as if there were still one more angry shout imprisoned within him. But she was saying as she adjusted her collar, "But Davy, I have to ask someone what I ought to do about Ken."

"For God's sake, Vicky, if a girl has to ask whether she should or shouldn't, the answer is — she shouldn't!"

She looked up at him with puzzlement and an odd relief. She shook her head slowly. "I'm *so* mixed up," she said, as she went to the door. Then, in a moment, her expression cleared to thoughtfulness. "Do you remember that part where Christophe had to run away to Geneva and he meets this doctor's wife?" she asked.

6

Bannerman had promised to be in Wickersham on the nineteenth of February, a Friday, but on the very morning that the brothers waited for him, he called from Milwaukee to say that he was tied up in a conference that looked as if it might last several days. Of course, if Ken and Davy wanted to come all the way down in this weather, he might be able to steal a few hours for them.

"But we wanted you to see what we've got here," Ken said desperately into the telephone. "You ought to know what you're getting for your money." He glanced at Davy for help, but Davy only shrugged and shook his head.

"Nobody's more anxious to see your setup there than I am," *Bannerman's* voice was saying. "But I understand that you still don't get a picture, so I won't be of much help to you. You'd have to explain it all to me anyhow. Unless," he added hopefully, "you fellows want to put the whole thing off until next week?"

His wish for a postponement was what decided Ken.

"We'll be down there," he said shortly. "It'll take a couple of hours with the roads the way they are, but we'll be there, all right. Where's your hotel?"

Ken hung up the receiver and stood for a moment with his hand still on it.

"He's going to want to duck out," he said slowly. He turned to look at the special display that had taken three days to arrange just to give Bannerman the illusion of progress. The conglomeration of circuits, glass tubing and apparatus looked very impressive, but it was to have served only as a background for an explanation of failure. Ken was positive that Bannerman's enthusiasm could be revived if only he could see where the money had been spent. One good thing, though, had come from the stage setting. Inadvertently Davy had come up with a simple method for spraying the photoelectric mesh with cesium hydride under vacuum, and Ken's three attempts so far had been failures. Ken would have been able to say very truthfully, "It was the one thing that's been holding us up for five weeks now, but Davy's got a way to lick it. That glass projection there under the mesh is the housing for his atomic spray. Davy, show Carl the way it's going to operate."

Ken looked down at the display now and grunted in self-contempt.

"I only wish we had a photograph of that to take along. Well, let's pack up our notes and get dressed so we can start."

"You don't really plan for us to drive down, do you?" Davy asked. "We'll freeze, and besides we might have to rebuild the car as we go."

"Who's got money for train fare? We'll get one flat, that's all."

There had been no snow for several weeks and the drifts on the ground were already rotting. The day was a hard cruel blue. Ken and Davy took along their felt hats for the city, but they both wore knitted caps that came down over their ears. Ken had goggles. Above their heads, the low canvas racing top slatted against the pompoms of their caps. Most of the road was clear and Ken drove as fast as he could, taking skids as ordinary hazards. The one flat—left rear, as predicted—happened just outside Shorewood, but the car rolled into Garson's garage, and Andy Garson gave them a hand because their fingers were almost frozen from the three-hour ride.

The Milwaukee streets were canals of slush. At the icicle-decorated canopy of the Marquette Hotel just off East Wisconsin Avenue, Ken removed the goggles and looked at his wrist watch.

"We made an average of forty," he said triumphantly. "So no cracks about the car."

They stowed their caps, mittens and scarves under the seat and went into the lobby. Davy's ears and neck felt very naked and exposed, and he kept wanting to glance up at the brim of his felt hat to see if

he was wearing it at the right angle. He was so unused to its unwieldy balance that he was afraid that he had put it on backwards.

The hotel clerk said that Mr. Bannerman would be right down. In the palm, leather and paneling of the lobby, Davy cautiously took his hat off and glanced inside. He had been wearing it correctly all along, but he didn't replace it. In five minutes Carl Bannerman came down, as round, fat and lively as ever except that his eyes were blood-shot with strain and he smelled of cigars and recently drunk whisky. Davy could sense his underlying impatience.

"Sit down, boys," Bannerman said. "Let's make ourselves comfortable in that corner over there. I'd invite you up to the room, but the discussion is going hot and heavy. What's the good word?"

"We're getting places, all right," Ken said. "Faster than we expected in some ways and slower in others. All we need is time."

Bannerman nodded and Davy wondered if the man was simply agreeing with his own unannounced decision that he was in on a losing proposition.

"You bet," Bannerman said. "This project is bigger and tougher than you boys originally thought. I figured as much."

"But we're licking it," Ken insisted urgently. His hair was smooth from the pressure of his woolen cap, and with a regular shirt, tie and suit, he looked very manly and businesslike to Davy. Davy adjusted his own tie and wished that he didn't feel so self-conscious in his good clothes. He watched Ken, who seemed as much at ease as if he were in his overalls. Ken was talking earnestly to Bannerman, recounting the details of all the work they had done. Davy had sweated every step of the way, but now Ken was making him feel that he had been through an adventure. And how ingenious they had been! From the way Ken was telling it, Davy had a picture of two shrewd-faced, clean-cut, serious-minded young investigators, frowning abstractedly as they worked without pause, never at a loss, never out of temper, never distracted by any outside interests. Davy began to believe it himself. He decided that if Bannerman were to offer him a cigar, he'd accept it.

Bannerman offered no cigars. He merely went on nodding, looking seriously at the notes and sketches that Ken thrust in front of him.

Davy had the uneasy feeling that in some way that wasn't at all obvious, Ken was building up a case against himself, and Bannerman was shrewdly saving it to deluge them both.

A bellhop stopped by the table, coughing discreetly as an interruption.

"I just got a call for another deck of cards from your room, Mr. B. Is it still OK?"

Bannerman nodded and then realized what had been said. He suddenly turned red, and took a dollar from his billfold, expertly folding it lengthwise with his fingers as he handed it over.

"Don't think that conference isn't on the level, boys," he said puffily. "Got to relax, you know."

Davy could tell that Ken wasn't getting it, and he suppressed the question, "*Have they been relaxing all night, Carl?*"

"The fact is," Bannerman said, pushing away the notes, "I can see you fellows are convinced that you're on the right track. That's good enough for me. Plenty good enough. I want you to know I've got all the faith in the world in you two, and I appreciate your coming down here to tell me all this. Deeply."

Davy knew that the thought wasn't finished, but Ken broke in. "That's good news to us, Carl. We had the idea you were getting ready to back out on us."

Bannerman looked astonished. "What gave you that idea?"

"You'd promised to back us to the tune of five thousand dollars and all we've seen is three. We're broke, Carl. Davy and I have been using what we can from our own salaries."

"I'm glad you brought that up, Ken. There's a point that needs some airing," Bannerman said and his tone made Davy's heart sink. "Money's tight for me right now and has been all along. Perhaps in a week or two things'll shape up a little better. The idea that occurred to me, listening to you, is that you kids have grossly underestimated this whole deal. Grossly." He patted himself for cigars and then signaled to a bellboy with a flick of his wrist.

"Coronas?" asked the boy, as if he had taken Mr. B's order so many times before that the nuances of Mr. B's tastes were an intimate bond between them.

"The usual," Bannerman agreed. He went on. "The thing I was about to say is that we need outside financing. What's the use of staggering along from buck to buck? You can't do justice to the work you're supposed to be doing and my own feeling is that I'm sort of letting down the project from my end. We need thousands — tens of thousands."

"That's your department, isn't it?" Ken asked. He sounded worried.

"It most certainly is. You've got nothing to think about. The fact is, boys — if I can repeat myself — here, have some cigars — hold the match *below* the tip, Davy, *below* — The fact is I happen to know money will be no trouble. Talk about this idea to anybody with a nickel's worth of vision, and they begin to drool. They wave money in your face. You tell me you need money and I can go out and raise another eight thousand just like that! It's no problem, I repeat, it's simply a matter of distributing information —"

"Another eight thousand?" Davy said when he saw that Ken was letting the remark pass. "What happened to the first eight thousand?"

"What?" Bannerman asked blankly.

"Yes, what?"

"Oh that! Well, the fact is that I was selling some of my own share. Davy, you're not getting the full benefit of that cigar, letting it burn only on one side. Turn it, boy, turn it — you're smoking air, not good tobacco. To get back to that transaction. Yes. I was telling some fellows about this investment of mine and they got interested. They're friends of mine, old friends — and I felt duty bound to let them in for a little. Don't worry about it for a minute. Think of them as *my* partners in a separate venture."

"But they're our partners, too!" Ken said.

"They're not; they're members of my syndicate."

"Now, wait a minute, Carl, you had no right —"

"But I did have a right," Bannerman said with an assertive affability that revealed that he wasn't going to retreat one inch. "If I want, I can sell out my entire end. Our contract placed no conditions on that. Hell, how would *you* feel if I said you couldn't sell any of your share to raise a little extra capital? And while we're on that, I don't see why *you* don't unload a small percentage yourself —"

"But what happened to that eight thousand?" Davy asked.

"I spent it, I guess," Bannerman said and laughed. "The fact is, very seriously, the money came along at a time when I had a lot of debts and you weren't asking for anything."

"Wasn't half of that ours?" Ken's voice was caught between anger and a reluctance to alienate Bannerman.

"It was not," said Bannerman, losing some of his agreeable quality. "We split fifty-fifty on all the profits from the invention. We do not split fifty-fifty on the sale of my property. You want some of that kind of money, I know several enterprising capitalists who would be only too glad to buy in. Radio stock is up fifty per cent over last year

and general investors are beginning to realize that the industry is here to stay. In a few years, it'll be even better. We've got a pie here that can go on being cut as long as there's a knife and each slice is pure gold —"

"Listen, Carl," said Ken quietly. "You're just giving me a lot of fast talk. I know that if Davy and I were to raise some money by selling part of our interest, that money would be put right into the project, which means we'd be sharing with you. Furthermore, for you to have sold without consulting us violated the spirit of the contract. And you know it. You were cutting corners. The way I see it, you'd sell us out in a minute if the price was right. Well, it's our own fault for letting you write the contract to suit yourself. But you're going to live up to whatever contract there is. Now you promised us five thousand dollars so we've got two more coming. You're running a card game upstairs instead of driving out to our shop as you promised. OK. What we want is that two thousand dollars. Come on, Davy."

Bannerman stared at him. "Ken," he said accusingly. "You're angry!"

"You're damn right I am. Davy and I haven't been beating our brains out for fun. Even with the three thousand you gave us, you're already five thousand ahead of the game. One hundred and sixty per cent profit. Who the hell are you to complain!"

"Now you boys sit down. Sit right down. I won't let you go away in that frame of mind. It'll just affect your work. I know creative people too well—I've worked with too many artists not to know. And suppose I do have a few weaknesses? Who's perfect? The fact is, boys, you're on the threshold of really big money and you're still not used to the numbers involved. What's two thousand dollars? What's eight? Chicken feed! We're talking about a multimillion-dollar industry and within a few years your cigar bill will be two thousand dollars. Davy, for Christ's sake, you've ruined that cigar!"

"Put that damn stogie down!" Ken growled, taking the cigar from Davy's fingers. "You heard me, Carl, two thousand dollars."

"And you won't stay for lunch?"

"We can't afford to have lunch," Ken said. "All we've got is the money for gas back home."

Davy rose and glanced at the inside of his hat before putting it on. He followed Ken out to the car and they drove in silence to a hash-house on the other side of town. Then they put on their woolen caps,

their scarves and mittens and raced back north to Wickersham with only one near collision.

The next day they received a letter from Bannerman, with a money order for five hundred dollars wrapped up in a note that said, "Never go away mad."

Davy glanced at the message and handed it back to Ken.

"Does he still tickle you?" he asked wryly.

Chapter Five

Three weeks later, the last snowstorm of winter swirled a bleak white stillness about the barn. The iron stove was cherry red and two kerosene heaters hummed out their oily breaths, but Ken and Davy still had to work under several layers of sweaters.

They were racing furiously against time because once again there was no money. Almost half of Bannerman's last payment had gone for unpaid bills; the rest they owed themselves as back salary. Even this would have gone into the work, but Margot insisted that the house-keeping debts had become too pressing. Yet more than three thousand dollars had passed through their fingers. The sum sounded like a fortune to Davy as he went over the accounts to see where it had all gone. Ken wrote to Bannerman, but neither he nor Davy had much hope. The only escape from this pinching exasperation lay in trying to accomplish as much as possible before the final showdown that had to come.

Their immediate problem was one of technique: the one-sided coating of photosensitive material on the mesh—so exquisitely fine that it gleamed like a disc of silver mist. The entire operation had to be performed under vacuum. All the previous day had been spent in baking the gaseous impurities out of the twelve-inch tube. Davy gingerly dismantled the electric furnace which had encased it. His hands were stiff with cold, and awkwardness could be disastrous. The pressure inside the tube was by this time down to one hundred-thousandth of the atmosphere. When it would fall still lower to a millionth, Ken would

engage the tiny atom oven which could melt and vaporize a pin point of photosensitive metal onto the mesh.

At intervals of five minutes, Davy interrupted the dismantling to take pressure readings on the McLeod gauge. He worked so warily that his eyes were strained with rigid attention. The vacuum pump had a steady throb in the stillness. Ken watched him in silence, ready with his own controls.

Impatiently, Ken said, "Take another reading, kid. We ought to be all the way down by now."

Davy rubbed his cold hands slowly against his chest to warm them to sensitivity. One of the stopcocks turned in the wrong sequence could send a solid mass of air smashing into the apparatus, as catastrophic as hitting the tube with a hammer.

Slowly, Davy turned the number one stopcock to the McLeod. The mercury began to rise, transforming the glass minaret into one of silver until finally a thread of molten metal shot up into the capillary, past all the division markings, and then struck the very top with a sharp little *tock*. The air in the entire apparatus was unobservable to the gauge. The pressure was now below one ten-millionth of an atmosphere.

An unexpected gust of cold air on his back told him that the side door had been opened, but he couldn't turn until all the mercury had flowed back to the bottom chamber. He glanced at Ken for information, but Ken at his controls was also imprisoned by his hands. Davy took only an instant to glance back at the heavy-coated man with a brimless fur hat who stood watching them.

"We're busy," Davy said shortly. "Come back later."

The man waited a moment and then decided to laugh. Apparently he wasn't used to being embarrassed.

"My name is Brock," he said, and then added in understatement, "I'm with the bank."

"You picked a bad time," Davy replied as he took his rehearsed station at the evaporation oven.

"Watch your control, you're too low by three millimeters," Ken said. He refused to listen to anybody or see anything except what came into the field of the telemicroscope. "We'll call you later, Mr. Brock. And when you go out, ease that door. We don't want any shocks at all."

"Mind if I watch?" Brock's persistently pleasant voice came from exactly the same place.

"OK," said Ken, but he immediately ignored the presence of a witness. The vaporizing oven was the size of a pencil head. It traveled

slowly down through the air lock driven by a lowering engine. Ken watched the scarcely perceptible motion through the telemicroscope until the position was correct.

"Don't turn the current on," Ken said, and moved back from the instrument. "Let's take a break here and see what we can do for Mr. Brock." He glanced towards the door, and went on in the same sharp voice. "Yes, Mr. Brock, what is it?"

"You might tell me what you're doing," Brock said, smiling a little. Davy finally took a good look at him. He was a shrewd bald man, over fifty and thin, now that the great overcoat had been removed. His tweed suit was rich and an elk's tooth swung from his gold watch chain. He came closer and seemed to regret that the work had stopped. "The bank has received some inquiries about you fellows and I thought I'd drop in myself and see."

"We don't owe anybody any money," Ken said. "As of ten days ago we're in the clear."

"It's not that kind of inquiry," Brock replied. His smile was cold. "As a matter of fact, somebody bought some kind of interest in you fellows and they want to be sure it's not a confidence game. Can't have that kind of thing going on in a town where the respectable merchants do business with outside capital, you know. But if it isn't honest work that's going on here, it's the damnedest swindle I ever saw!"

"We believe in it," Davy said simply.

"I can see that you do," Brock agreed. "I understand you fellows came in to see me last June while I was out of town. Why didn't you ever come back?"

"We didn't have to," Ken said, impatient to get back to work. "Somebody else came along and we did business with him."

"You mean Bannerman."

"Do you know him?" Davy asked.

"Met him," Brock said dryly.

Davy added, "Another reason we didn't come back to see you at the bank was that we weren't too sure you'd be interested. Banks are conservative, and this is a gamble — or *was* at that time."

"And it's not now?" Brock asked. His eyes tried to follow the convolutions of the pumping system. "Does it work?"

"We've got nothing to report," Ken said to put an end to matters. "There's still a lot of work to be done. Tell your man that my brother and I are sufficiently encouraged to keep on going."

Brock shrugged, but he was blandly annoyed by the dismissal. He

picked up his coat. "All right," he said affably. "But I just want to leave this thought with you. I'm sorry you didn't come back. Bankers like to take flyers as much as anyone else."

"Maybe we'll be dropping in on you one of these days," said Davy.

"Don't bother." Brock had found his poise. "I'm certainly interested in your project. Of course, I've been told what it is, but you won't want me as long as you've got your Carl Bannerman. 'By."

"Now wait a minute," Davy said. "You came in here to ask us some questions. You owe us a couple of answers. What *about* Carl Bannerman?"

"Nothing," Brock replied. "I *like* Bannerman. The bank does business for the circus when it's in town. But it's just my own personal preference not to be either a partner or an investor of his."

"Let's spell this out," Ken said. "Are you saying that you'd be interested if Carl were out of the picture?"

Brock slowly put his round fur hat on, and then thought for a moment, his hand resting on the doorknob. "I'd rather not spell it out," he said. "It's always bad business to come between husband and wife, and I guess the same goes for partners."

"Supposing the husband died," said Davy. "Would you marry a widow if she were still an attractive proposition?"

Brock glanced at him. "Did this widow poison her husband?"

"No. It looks like he might have died of incompatibility," Davy said laughing. "Or maybe suicide."

"Then I'd take her on," Brock said simply and left. Ken and Davy waited for several seconds. If Brock had come in a car, the departing engine was silenced by the thick swirl of snow.

"What do you think?" Davy asked finally, turning to his brother.

"Bull!" said Ken. He shrugged off the question. "Let's get back to the job."

Hours passed, but the work continued. At four-thirty, the oven and the glass baffle were finally raised back out of the camera tube and they took a five-minute rest.

Outside, the snow must have stopped hours before. The desolate winter morning had melted into a spring evening. The sun was high in a soft sky and the drifts were white rounded shreds on damp earth. The thermometer read thirty-nine degrees.

"Another year shot," Ken sighed. "Maybe next year this time we'll be out of the woods."

"You still haven't answered my question," Davy reminded him.

A thousand questions had been exchanged since the morning, but Ken knew exactly what Davy meant. He still temporized.

"What do *you* think?" he asked.

"I think we ought to drop Carl," Davy said. "He hasn't made good on his promises. Neither have we, but we couldn't help it. He's just using us like a phony Mexican gold mine and he's going to get us into trouble. I say to drop him like a shot before he drops us."

"You'd really do that?" Ken asked. He was looking at Davy with the same expression as in the final examination last June — incredulous, afraid, admiring, puzzled by a mind so different from his own. Then he frowned. "No. He came through for us when we first needed him, and we'd be dogs to drop him. As long as we know what he's liable to pull, we can be prepared."

"You're kidding yourself, Ken."

But Ken shook his head. He was not going to be stampeded.

"We want to do the decent thing," he said. "And Margot will back me up. You'll see."

"I don't get it," Davy said. "You'll do things to people that really shock the hell out of me and yet your hair stands on end over something that's absolutely necessary to get the work done as we originally planned. At least I know what I want, and I'll move heaven and hell to get it!"

"Well, you're not going to move me."

"I don't think I'll ever have to, Ken," Davy said slowly. "Because if you keep on the way you're going, one of these days you'll just blow yourself out of the way!"

2

At that moment, Margot was numb with an apprehension of her own. For the first time in months, she was riding home on the trolley.

She sat by a window and watched the spring evening settle over the melting snow. The gray-haired motorman balanced his drooping corpulence on the toadstool seat, and Margot caught him glancing back at her with his smile of friendliness.

"I was trying to figure back to when you rode with me last," he said.

"So was I, Mr. Toohey," she lied, for in her mind she was over on the other side of town in the plant office, hearing the slow dismantling of

noise, as one by one the machines came to the day's end. Now that she might never again hear the hum and racket, she found herself recalling the excitement with nostalgia.

The shallow undulations of the telephone lines overhead raced her along the street, and she prayed that the wires might be carrying a surprised angry voice demanding to know where she was. Oh God, she thought miserably, she had no heart for such gambles — she was only a fool outsmarting herself; but outwardly her face was impassive.

"And I was thinking too how you used to look working around the garage. Doesn't seem so long ago. Kind of cute in those pigtails and man's pants, and now you're a real lady."

Leaving unsaid, she thought bitterly, "No matter what everyone says about you carrying on with that Vollrath fellow." Anyhow it was nice of him.

"You still at that aviation plant?" he asked.

"No," she said. She was surprised at the level quality of her voice. "I'm back at the store again."

"You don't say!" He turned involuntarily. "Since when?"

"Since this afternoon." She got up from the seat and walked towards the front door. "My best to Mrs. Toohey."

"Sure thing." The car stopped just even with the garage. "Don't see much of the boys either with those doors closed all the time. Are they really making a million dollars like everybody says?"

"Everybody's making a million," she replied.

She hoped to hear the telephone ringing as she opened the door, but the shop was still. The apparatus, in all its glistening complication, impressed her. She was continually amazed these days at the way the boys went about their work with authority and sureness. To her, they would always be just a couple of kids in jeans, shouting and pulling at her attention. Only at moments like this, when her own time seemed to be racing too fast for her, did she realize that in each moment that she glanced away from them to her own life, Ken and Davy grew older, deeper-voiced, thicker-limbed. She could hear them in the kitchen preparing dinner — Davy's calm rumble and Ken's deeper curt protests. And as always, when Margot heard Ken's voice, she was stricken with guilt for her neglect, with pity for his love and with a nameless irritation, as if he were standing in her way.

She opened the door and paused for a moment, inexpressibly tired.

"Is it all right if we have fish cakes again?" Davy asked. He was sit-

ting at the table with the white balls laid out in a square array.

"To hell with the fish cakes," Ken said. He stood by the stove, heating up a pan. "Listen, Margot —"

"Wasn't there a call for me?" she asked.

"No," said Davy. "Margot, we want some advice —"

"Oh, leave me alone!" she retorted, above her guilty awareness that once again, in spite of all her good resolutions, she was averting her head from them. All she wanted was a little time, she told herself in excuse; a little time to see how her own life was going to come out. She went into her own room, leaving a stunned silence behind her. Like kids, she thought bitterly; like kids playing tag about a mother distracted by bills, and then hurt and shocked when she slaps them away. She pulled open the door for a moment. "I'll talk to you later," she said, and then threw herself down on the bed.

What made me take such a chance, she wondered in amazement. Only once since Christmas had she broken her self-denying promise again; and after her third refusal of herself to Doug, he had ceased to press her altogether.

"If you want to be just a secretary, that's all right with me," he had said. "I don't understand it, and I'm just too damned busy to make the effort."

She was a good secretary, and she had caught on rapidly to the ramifications of his interests. If she hadn't seen him looking at her from time to time in a certain way, she would have thought he had forgotten what they used to be to each other; especially when he started going around with that blond Mrs. Kopf. Doug went out to the Country Club with her and her husband. Mrs. Kopf visited the plant once and wore a beige knitted suit with a skirt that suggested a cute and tricky figure. She had a high natural color and light-blue eyes that watered a little. Once, when Margot was out at the house, submissively taking dictation, Mrs. Kopf blew in as if she owned the place. Whether Doug knew it or not, at least Margot was sure he had insisted on having her take work there just to see she wasn't making him miss a thing.

She went out a few times with Mel Thorne to a new roadhouse called the Château that was supposed to have a New York bartender and a six-piece band from Chicago. She felt the chill of lawlessness when Mel confided to her that four bootleggers owned the place. Mel was an unhappy, lonely man. He spoke very earnestly about what a lot of bull the war had been, and that the German aviators were really wonderful guys. In the beginning, back in 1914-1915, all the flyers —

the French, British, Germans — had known each other from the old exhibition and experimental racing days. There had been no shooting then; all that crazy stuff came later.

Unfortunately for him, his half-timid approach to her was exactly what she had guessed it would be. When he spoke, he touched her wrist for emphasis, and sometimes his hand lingered. Once, he tapped his knee with his forefinger and then, leaning forward, he began to tap hers just as if he didn't know that there was any difference. She looked him straight in the eye and murmured, "You don't say!" But he was afraid of her; he used his hands only in that yearning, unconvinced way and went no further, as if he wanted her to make the next move beyond that. Well, she thought, he'd have to show her that he wanted her a damn sight more than that.

She quit the job at the aviation plant only because she didn't know how to back down from the promise she had made to Doug. She ached for him so that she couldn't sleep at night, but just because he was the kind of man he was, she knew that she would be making the mistake of her life if she surrendered voluntarily. She loved the job, but when she thought everything over, she knew that she loved Doug more than anything and she knew that she couldn't have both together for very long. That was the way he was. That noon, then, without any notice, with all her work cleaned up, she told Mel — Mel rather than Doug — that she was quitting, and then walked out. The rest was up to Doug, and he still hadn't called to find out what had happened.

In the kitchen, Ken and Davy had resumed their deep-toned conversation, but they kept their voices lowered as if she were sick and that irritated her even more. They seemed to be discussing Bannerman. She rose, sighing. There was nothing to be gained by moping. Her panic was over and her nerves were calm. She opened the door and went into the kitchen.

"Let's eat," she said abruptly. "What about those fish cakes?"

Davy watched her, smiling a little. "I'm on your side, Margot," he said very quietly. "Whatever it is."

She glanced at him, her eyes intimate with unspoken gratitude and self-mockery. "It could be that I'm the biggest fool in the world. I'll let you know."

"Let him know what?" Ken asked from the stove, carrying the plates of fish cakes and spaghetti. "What's going on?"

"Bannerman," Davy said glibly. He turned to his sister and told her about Brock's visit that morning and what it could mean to have the

bank behind them, but Ken was firm in his decision to shame Bannerman for his careless treatment of them.

"We're going to show that guy we're not like him," Ken said. "Let *him* be the one to try to weasel out. We stand by our own word. What do *you* say, Margot?"

"I wasn't listening," she said after a moment.

"You sure you feel all right?" Ken insisted.

"I'm fine. It's just —" The telephone started to ring.

Davy saw her face turn white. She didn't move.

"Answer it, Davy," she said in a small voice.

He glanced at Ken and then rose, leaving the door open behind him as he went into the shop. It was Vollrath, as usual embarrassed at addressing him or Ken by their first names. Most of the time, he said, "Hello, is your sister home?"

"It's for you, Margot," Davy said, and when she went out to the telephone, he and Ken sat at the table saying nothing. Ken's face was set and hard. He listened to Margot's voice without pretense.

"Yes," she was saying in the distant emptiness of the barn. "Mel told you exactly what I said — I *wanted* to quit, that's all. . . . No, it was nothing you said or did — I *did* enjoy the work. . . ." Her voice was getting colder and colder. "It's just the way I felt . . . Well, then you're forgetting what I said when I first took the job." There was silence, and then they heard her laugh softly. "I could have easily meant just that. . . . Well, *you* had stopped asking . . ." She laughed again with a tenderness that made Ken's eyes opaque. He rose and slammed the door shut on her voice.

"My God, she sounds as if she were already with him!" He moved with suppressed wildness. "What are we going to do about her, Davy? What are we going to do?"

"Nothing." Davy calmly watched his brother. "Not a damned thing. Why should we?"

Ken looked down at him with amazement. "Listen, she's your sister! Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"It doesn't mean a thing. She's my sister. OK. Is Vicky my sister?" His own voice suddenly rasped with hardness. "Am I supposed to say anything about that too?"

Ken's mouth opened. "Listen, Vicky and I have never — She's the one girl who — ! What's Vicky got to do with this, anyhow?"

Davy had only to think of Vicky to know how Ken must feel at the sound of Margot's soft laughter, but there was no pity in the insight,

for suddenly he hated Ken. He must have hated Ken for a long bitter time. Davy lowered his eyes, but he could have closed them and still not evaded the torturing perception.

Margot came in, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling.

"Everything all right now?" Ken asked with heavy irony.

"Everything's fine. I don't work there any more."

"What do you mean you don't work there! You weren't talking to any man you'd just quit."

"But I did quit."

"But *why*?" His anger was shadowed by his bewilderment.

"Why?" She paused for a moment and then burst out. "What's so impossible to understand about refusing to take money from a man so you can feel free to do as you please? Now you sit down and eat your supper!"

"I cooked it, I don't have to eat it!" he shouted in pure unreason. "Money? All your life, your one ambition's been money. As a kid you played with the idea the way other girls play with dolls."

"Ken, shut *up*!" She was close to tears.

"And don't tell me that you're doing it for us," he went on. "You're ashamed of us. Every girl I ever had I brought home for you to meet and the same for Davy. Have *you* ever brought him here — or us there? It's just his lousy money. All right, if that's the way it is — I'll show you we don't need it from him. In two years, we'll be as dirty with money as he is. To hell with trying to be decent. And to hell with sentiment! We'll drop Carl so fast and hard, he won't know what hit him. We'll take up Brock and then drop him too. Don't you worry, you won't have to be ashamed of us. We'll give you something to love, to be loyal to —"

Davy rose abruptly from the table without volition and grabbed Ken's collar.

"That's enough," he said. "This is the sister you're taking care of, is it? Another crack, and I'll rap you across the mouth!"

Ken's broken eyes blinked at him, shocked by Davy's intense violence, which was as much defense of Margot as it was threatened murder for Vicky.

Breathing slowly, Ken disengaged himself and sat down in his place. He was so miserable with shame that he couldn't raise his eyes. He took a mouthful of food and chewed it slowly the way a child does when on the verge of tears. After a moment, he whirled out of his seat with his plate in his hand.

"These damn things are stone cold," he said with his back to them. "Anybody else want me to heat up theirs?"

Nobody answered and so he stood at the stove, crying silently while the fish balls hissed in the frying pan.

3

Stewart's law office, in the corner of the Territorial Building, was a small cluttered room that needed the spaciousness supplied by the two windows overlooking the Square; otherwise the walls would long ago have exploded from the anger and bitterness that had charged the atmosphere here. Politicians came from the Capitol across the Square to argue about who the hell had told John to get up on the floor the way he did; and while old Charlie was a fine fellow and certainly regular, that district now needed that old get-up-and-go.

Up here, a middle-aged vestryman of St. Barnabas's had cursed his father for leaving his money to the infant son of that whore he had married late in life; an embarrassed man had tried to explain to the widow of his late partner why she had no equity in the firm, but he *could* let her have five hundred dollars to tide her over — Until she died? the widow demanded bitterly. Stewart, the son of a farmer, had grown from a black-haired clerk to a dry, gray-haired man, on the diet of bitter passions. Only the faintest shadows of these dramas were put on paper and filed away as monuments to the fact that men cared deeply, but grew older and then changed their minds, cursing those who had agreed with them in the first place. It was a diet calculated to make a man weary, passionless and careful — with the deadly fairness of someone who was touched by nothing any more.

His calm interjections and patient shrugs told Davy the whole story while Ken and Bannerman shouted at each other in the furious opera of cross-accusation.

"— and I mean the very lowest kind of parasite!" Ken was saying. "To you, this is just some kind of con game — a rope-in for what you call 'marks.' Well, the hell it is! What this work means to Davy and me, you'll never understand. And you're figuring that we wouldn't stop work even if we wanted to, so you can just ride along for nothing —"

"I don't call thirty-five hundred dollars nothing!" Carl shot back.

"If it's not the five thousand you guaranteed, it's nothing," Ken told

him flatly. "If we asked for that money once, we asked twenty times. What we got was an occasional pat on the back. Who are you to cry about thirty-five hundred? You've already made five thousand profit on it."

"Now just a minute, son," Stewart said, rolling back in his chair until he touched the faded state map tacked to the wall behind him. He pointed a finger at Ken. Out of mere habit, his voice slid into the brutal harshness that he called his "cross-examinationer." "A contract in this state —"

"Shove that!" Ken said. "Don't *just-a-minute* me, and don't *son* me. We know our rights. In two years we're going to be right up on top. We're not carrying any dead weight. You can save your speeches for the Boosters and the Rotary and the other banana-oil merchants. Right here, now, in this room, we're talking facts, and the fact is that our contract is as null as it is void!" He strode to the door and held it open. "If you want to sue, sue and be damned! Come on, Davy."

Davy didn't move from his chair. "I'm not ready yet, Ken," he said quietly. "There's a little more to say."

"Then you say it," Ken replied. "I've laid it down the way I see it, and that's the way it's going to be."

The door slammed, and Davy was uncomfortably alone with two very angry, older, more experienced men. He allowed the silence to draw out. He was frightened.

"Got a cigarette, Carl?" he asked, patting his pockets. Bannerman tossed him a package, but he was no longer the amiable little fat man. He was defending his own interests; he was being cheated; and he was determined not to yield. His five-thousand-dollar profit was too far short of a million.

"Who the hell are you to write me a letter like this?" he had demanded as soon as Ken and Davy had entered the office. His rasping voice held no memory of his paternal pride in them on the day of their presentation, or of his expansive protectiveness on that night of celebration. "By Christ, on the strength of this letter alone, I could spend the rest of my life suing you two kids for slander! Listen, I have legitimate business interests here that have to be protected. Hell, I was your *friend*, but when you write me this kind of letter telling me you're going to tear me off unless the rest of the money is sent by return mail, you boys lost your friend! I'll tell you just what I think. I think you got your dinkus or whatever it is so it'll work. On my money! But you want to prat me out before you cut up the score. Well, it's an old, old con and

I'm not going for it. That's a good contract, isn't it, Counselor? OK. I'm sitting on it!" He writhed in his chair. "Ptah! Two clean-cut, high-type, one-hundred-per-cent boys, I said! Two lousy grifters, that's what!"

"Now, wait a minute, Carl —" Stewart had said warningly.

"Wait, my arm!" Bannerman had turned to Ken. "Well, what have you got to say for yourself, Fast-Talk Mallory? Hey you, blond boy, I'm talking to you, you — the Kollege Kid, the Emperor of Electrons — what do you say?"

Ken's answer had flooded forth with as much rancor, and now that he was gone, Carl sat in twitching silence, staring balefully at Davy. Ken's slamming out of the door had only sealed up a dead end still more tightly. So Davy remained behind, smoking quietly, letting the minutes pass while his own heart's pounding grew quieter, while Bannerman's fury grew lean on silence. Stewart just watched him above a bridge of fingers. Finally, Davy put out the cigarette.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said slowly. "Really sorry. In a way, this whole thing is my fault because I started it, and I'm sorry —"

Carl rose to the bait and said impatiently. "Don't be so sorry —"

"I'm sorry you're such a stupid bastard!" Davy shot back. "You've got this whole thing so damned cockeyed, it's pathetic! Ken was wrong. But if *he's* wrong, then there isn't any word left for you. Why, Carl, you're cutting your own throat. Listen, Mr. Stewart, I can't guarantee that any offer I'll make will be acceptable to my brother. But this man is so excited he can't even listen to sense. Tell him to take a walk around the Square and maybe you and I can find some meeting ground."

Stewart puckered his lips in deprecation. "My client has every right to get excited when his interests are threatened."

"They're not," Davy said impatiently. "And I'll show you why not. We can settle this whole thing in ten minutes."

"I can *listen* to what you have to say," Stewart went on. "You and I can talk, but we'll just be discussing — sort of trying on ideas. Is that understood? OK with you, Carl?"

Bannerman left. The door slammed for a second time, but the air was easier. Stewart's eyes were good-humoredly shrewd. He seemed to Davy to have been through this kind of thing so many times that it had become mere routine. Yet Davy's voice went on earnestly.

"The way you explained this whole thing to me last year," he said. "This contract really has no meaning until there's a patent."

"Oh come on, now, I'm sure I didn't say exactly that." Stewart was being kind but watchful.

"Well, you certainly implied it. We've got to be partners in something tangible — a piece of property. An idea is not a piece of property. An idea reduced to practice in the form of a patent *is* a piece of property."

"Well —" Stewart said slowly, neither admitting nor denying the statement.

"All right then. Carl's part of the bargain was to put up money so we could reduce our idea to practice. Neither one of us has fulfilled his part. Carl hasn't given us all the money coming to us, and we still haven't reduced our idea to practice."

Stewart thought for a moment. "Then why put all the blame on Carl?"

"Because we need the money in order to do our part. He's *kept* us from fulfilling our obligation."

"You been talking to a lawyer on this?"

"Just you."

Stewart leaned back in his squeaking swivel chair.

"How do we know you haven't already reduced your idea to practice? We can't go out to the shop and see for ourselves because you can show us whatever you want us to see."

"That's right," Davy agreed. "It's our job as the specialists to decide when it's safe to apply for a patent. If we apply before we work out the right circuits and designs, we can be turned down for having an unworkable device. All we'd be doing is to disclose what we've got to anybody who's interested. But what I want to know is this — where do *you* get off to accuse us of holding back? You still haven't given us the money that we need to reach a workable stage. You don't have a leg to stand on."

"I'm not saying you're right and I'm not saying you're wrong. I'm just listening, remember that. What do you have in mind?"

"I don't agree with Ken that Carl should be shut out. Ken's sore and I know just how he feels. As a matter of principle, I'm willing for Carl to retain an interest for the money he's put up so far."

"How much?"

Davy watched him for a moment. "So far he's put up thirty-five hundred dollars and for the sake of argument, I'm willing to forget his profit of five thousand. I can see that we're going to need maybe ten or fifteen times that figure before we're through. I'll tell you what I'll do.

If this thing *does* pay off, I'm willing to let Carl get a profit of almost one thousand per cent — twenty-five thousand dollars."

Stewart looked at him with interest. "The first twenty-five thousand you take in?"

"Hell no! We'd pay him ten per cent of everything we get until he gets his twenty-five thousand. If we earn less, he gets less; but we have the right to pick up his interest any time we please for twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Davy, how much money is in your pocket right this minute?"

Davy blushed. "Why?"

"Come on. I really want to know."

"A dollar seventy-two." He looked at the coins. "Seventy-three."

Stewart laughed. "You had me going for a minute, the easy way you said twenty-five thousand. You know, boy, you did that like an old hand. You dangled that twenty-five thousand for bait, but you were really asking for Carl to cut his interest from fifty per cent down to ten. Not only down to ten, but with a ceiling of twenty-five thousand dollars."

"It's better than the alternative."

"I'll listen to that too."

"The alternative is that Carl gets nothing. Not a dime. I'll tell you why. Our agreement covers a development based on certain principles disclosed last June. OK. Ken and I can work out *another* development that doesn't depend on those principles. It can be done, you know. There isn't only one place you can build a bridge across a river, and there isn't only one kind of bridge you can build there. We'd find a new kind of system, and we'd still be protected against anyone else inventing our present one because that record of invention would show that we were the first ones to have it. Here's the plain fact, Mr. Stewart. This project means more to us than just the money involved. I don't know how to say it except that making it work is the only thing we care about or ever will care about until we succeed. This isn't just a problem in pure research. There's money involved and so we have to talk in money terms. Now you can take your choice of either proposition. There isn't any third one. Make that clear to Carl."

Late April was in Capitol Square when Davy reached the street. Davy walked slowly across the empty paths, wondering where Ken could have gone. He might have stopped in at the bookstore to pour out the remains of his anger for Vicky's sympathy, but Davy doubted it. Ken certainly had not gone to see Margot. Since the night of his

outburst he had avoided her as much as possible, as if he felt that he had behaved so badly that there was no hope of forgiveness. Ken seemed unreachable these past few weeks, locked away with an inner misery so that he and the black shape sat in a lonely cell staring at each other wondering who was the prisoner and who was the jailer.

Leadership in the negotiations with Stewart had fallen to Davy by default. Now he decided to keep going ahead as far as he possibly could on his own. He turned quickly out of the Square and went down State Street to the bank. Spring was there too in the quiet air.

Brock's desk was out in the center of the open floor. The boundaries of his office were marked only by a large rectangle of green carpet. An assistant was bending over him with papers when Davy entered, but Brock noticed Davy at once and motioned him to come over. Brock pointed to a seat next to the desk and continued his rapid examination of the papers before him, disposing of each one with either a curt "Yes" or "No" or a stated figure. The banker finished the brief consultation and then turned to Davy with eyes that were owlish with humor.

"Well, son," said Brock in the tone of a man drawing out his favorite comedian. "What's the latest news about that widow?"

Davy smiled weakly. "She's not a widow yet, Mr. Brock, but she's downtown looking for mourning clothes."

Brock laughed out loud. He wore a dark gray suit with white piping on his vest. His high-lace shoes were black patent leather with gray suède tops; and as he leaned back with his legs crossed, Davy saw the slight bulges that his long winter underwear made at the ankles of his silk socks.

"You can tell the lady for me," he said with arch gallantry, "she can go out and buy herself the very best there is. After all, she's going to find herself with a wedding settlement of maybe fifty thousand dollars."

"What?"

"Oh, that's the figure, all right. I've already gone over your accounts with Charlie Stewart, and at the rate at which you fellows have been spending money, that's the amount you're going to need. And it's going to take at least a couple of years. You're going to need patent attorneys, a couple of assistants — a real first-class businesslike establishment run on business principles. Listen, boy, you're wrassling with the giants back East. Now it was all right for David in the Bible to go after Goliath with a slingshot, but this is the Year of Our Lord 1926, and the giants today make Goliath look like a shrimp."

"You say you went over this with Mr. Stewart?" Davy asked slowly.

"He's going to represent the company since he's already familiar with some of the problems. Charlie's an old friend of mine, you know. As a matter of fact," Brock added confidentially, "he's already called me to read the terms of the deceased's will. Charlie gave Bannerman a first-class representation; but after all, a lawyer isn't called upon to put up money for a client when he's broke."

"In that case, why didn't you buy out Bannerman directly?" Davy wanted to know.

Brock shrugged. "I didn't have to. The way I saw it, cleaning out Bannerman was going to be *your* little job, and besides," he added as he began to twinkle at his favorite joke, "I told you I never come between partners. That's bad business."

4

Ten days after Carl's acceptance of Davy's terms, the papers dissolving the original partnership were ready; and on a brilliant May morning with the odor of blossoms in Stewart's office, Ken and Davy signed themselves into freedom. Satisfaction was a small smile on Ken's lips, and even Davy's secret misgivings evaporated. They strolled through the sunshine of the streets to the bank looking at the town, at their own lives with new perspectives. The very air they breathed had a sparkling clarity. These expensive downtown shops now seemed suddenly as accessible as their neighborhood grocery store. In the small single window of Dow Bros., Tailor, standing with quiet dignity between two potted palms, was a bluish herringbone suit. A discreet hand-lettered sign said \$75. Until today, Dow's had been as remote from their lives as the Bank of England, but now Ken examined the suit quite dispassionately. "If they had it in brown, I'd take it," he remarked.

The wonderful elation was increased still more by the way Brock rose when they came in. "I thought you two fellows would never show up. Come on, we're eating at the Club."

The Civic Club just off State Street was a landmark — the old Schaeffer mansion with wooden octagonal towers and turrets that dripped with scrollwork and wrought-iron lace. On the lawn were still the iron stags that had always seemed to Davy a sign of aristocracy. Their hats were taken by a colored servant in a white coat. In the dining room were well-dressed men whose voices were louder, whose laughter was

more boisterous, than those of the faculty on the Hill. Among themselves, this way, they had such assurance of their own rightness that one was forced to accept them at their own valuation and walk respectfully.

Brock's usual table was set in a bay overlooking the spacious lawn, so that the banker sat facing the entire room.

"Help yourself to the menu, boys," he said, polishing his glasses on the napkin before him. Without the glittering crystalline armor over his eyes, Brock seemed more benign, naïve and vulnerable. He peered about expansively. "I love this place," he murmured. "You see, I remember it from when the Schaeffers still lived here. I used to dream of living in it myself, but by the time I was all grown up and settled out on the Heights, Mrs. Brock wouldn't move back to this section of town, not even for the Schaeffer place. Once somebody wanted it for a boarding-house, but I made the City Council extend the zoning restriction. When I got to be president here, the Club bought the place; and so finally it's mine whenever I want."

His thin smile was almost shy but his pleasure was genuine. For even if he had fulfilled the old dream only distantly, he had done it on other men's money, and no one had a right to ask for more. "Try the soup," he said. "We do pretty well here, but this place won't ever again see sights like the night of Sally Schaeffer's wedding reception. That night the ladies — well, maybe I'm old-fashioned, but back in the nineties they had something they don't have today. Of course, I'm all for progress and that kind of thing, but I'll never believe that a half-dressed, lipstick-painted, cigarette-smoking, Charleston-dancing flapper can hold a candle to the girls of that time. Even the men seemed bigger, more substantial. By George, you just *knew* Max Schaeffer had a million dollars and had lorded around with all that European aristocracy and New York Society!

"That night, there was dancing," he went on softly. "French champagne, fine cigars, lobster brought specially from the East, and there I was just a kid out of high school. That was one night I'll never forget, and old Max Schaeffer stood by his daughter exactly where I'm sitting right now. Well, here I am, and he lies buried in potter's field out in San Francisco where he lost everything in ninety-seven."

Brock was silent for a moment and shook his head to dispel a gloomy vision. "A man who could make that kind of money and then not hold onto it, I guess just didn't deserve it in the first place. Still, that night the old man certainly looked the part. You know, he was my first really rich man." He spoke now as a connoisseur, recalling with nostalgia the

flawed little gem that first aroused his passion of appreciation. "Ah well!" he raised his glass of water. "Here's to tomorrow's millionaires — may you get yours sooner and hang onto it longer!"

Halfway through lunch, he turned the talk to business.

"Our agreement should be all drawn up by next week. I've got my group with most of the capitalization except for one man coming through from Minneapolis day after tomorrow. Archie Thurston of Western Mills. Ever hear of him? No? Well, of course, Archie's not the same type as old Max Schaeffer. Styles in millionaires change, I suppose. One thing about Archie — he goes by first impressions. When I bring him to your place, I suggest you fellows fix it so that you're working on exactly the same thing you were the day I was out there. Very impressive-looking sight for the layman."

"We finished that stage," Davy said. "As a matter of fact, we were about to tear down most of the apparatus to make changes."

Ken glanced at him swiftly. "We can hold it up, Mr. Brock. We'll put on some kind of show for him."

"Now I don't mean for you to deceive Archie," Brock said hastily.

Ken turned to look at him. "We all believe in this project, Mr. Brock, and so nothing we do can have any intention to deceive."

"That's just what I meant," Brock said gratefully; and Davy saw that Ken was now the favorite Mallory.

On the way home, Davy remarked, "If Carl Bannerman had asked us to do something like this, we would have said he was trying to get us to help him 'rope a mark.'"

"Can that stuff!" Ken said sharply, but he wasn't happy. "We're just earning our money. That's all that counts."

The man from Minneapolis arrived in a chauffeur-driven cream-colored Pierce Arrow limousine mud-splashed with the horizontal streaks of speed. Mr. Thurston towered grimly over Brock — a big florid man twitching with impatience. He had strong manicured hands, and his expression was almost sulky.

He kept murmuring, "Well, thanks — very interesting, you fellows," and trying to back away to the door, but Brock held him fast while questioning Ken with unusual enthusiasm. Finally, Thurston could stand no more and pulled urgently at Brock's elbow.

"Fred, can we step outside for a minute? A few things I'd like to discuss."

Through the side door, Thurston's voice came booming back plain-

tively — "Fred, I *told* you I don't give a damn about this kind of thing —"

"Now, you listen to me, Archie!" Brock said and firmly linked arms with his companion as they passed out of earshot. Davy and Ken stood very still but said nothing. The two men must have walked completely around the barn for the next time they passed the door, Brock could be heard saying — "And this thing inside is to radio what the auto was to the bicycle. Archie," he continued sincerely, pausing in the doorway, "you don't know a man more conservative than I am, but I venture to predict that in ten years a million dollars will be the rating of the average middle-class American. And, by George, if you don't have faith in your own country's future —"

"I'm as good a Republican as you are, Fred Brock, and you know it, but the rest of that stuff is a lot of boloney and I'm sorry to see you've fallen for it."

Ten minutes later, the argument was still unsettled. Brock stuck his head inside the door to say that all four of them were having lunch at the Club.

At the table in the bay window, Thurston was as restive as ever.

"Now, Fred, if you'll just excuse me, I want to set these two boys absolutely straight," he said swiftly. "You fellows look to me to be two nice kids who know what you're doing. I wish you every success. But it's just not for me. Anything to do with grain, fine, I'm interested, but only a sucker goes out of his own line. And don't keep saying Billy Durant to me," he burst out to Brock. "Durant and those fellows in motors were either in the engine field or wagons or carriages before the automobile was invented. Besides, boys, I'm only passing through to Milwaukee — on business," he added, deliberately facing Brock. "No point in asking you to come along, I guess, Fred?"

Davy saw Brock glance at his friend with an unexpected compassion.

"No, Archie," he said quietly. "You just run along."

Thurston's big red face was sheepish. "No lecture this time, Fred?"

"No, Archie. No use, is there?"

"Not a damn bit."

Brock took a long breath and lowered his eyes. "But if you're looking for company, why not take these two fellows along? As far as I know, neither of them has any attachments and they're young enough for that kind of thing."

"Now, wait a minute there, Mr. Brock," Ken said as he began to

understand. "We don't want to horn in on anybody's party. Mr. Thurston here —"

"Mr. Thurston here is not going to any party," Thurston said bitterly. "Mr. Thurston is going to Milwaukee not because he wants to or because he was invited, but because he damn well has to knock his head against a wall someplace, and it's bad business to do it at home. Ah, to hell with it, let's go!"

Ken and Davy consulted silently across the table, but Ken's face was hard and insistent. He was determined to accept.

"Do as you please," Davy said. "I'd better stick around."

"We'll *both* go," said Ken.

Going out to the car, Brock drew Davy back with him. Davy hoped that he would be reprieved, and he was grateful to Brock for his understanding.

"I want you to know that you're doing me a big favor. Now he'll be bound to come in with us. Just see that he gets out in one piece." Brock patted Davy's shoulder. "You're starting the revels in distinguished company, young fellow."

The big car rumbled out of town and then raced down the highway. The outside world was a dreaming hum of spring green and wild flowers. Thurston had nothing to say for a while and he drank steadily, holding a bottle of Canadian Club in one hand and a silver tumbler in the other.

"Maybe it's just the spring," he said musingly. "I used to slide down the cellar door like that kid we just passed. Now I'm fifty-two. Me! Christ, it can't be! Sometimes I get the feeling that the minute I turn around, some joker rips another five years from the calendar. Another ten, twelve years and it'll be all over, and yet where did it go? I ask you, where did it go? Ten years ago I was OK. I believed in everything. If something turned out good, it was because I was so smart. Today, I know it's all a lot of bull! That stuff about sticking to my own field is a lot of bull too. I don't know anything about anything, and what scares me stiff is that nobody else knows anything about anything either. Nobody!" His hands tightened in desperation. "I've just got to burst out of something, that's all. Then maybe I'll be all right again. Listen, don't call me Mr. Thurston in front of the girls. Call me Archie."

Thurston took a suite at the Farrington full of tapestried furniture. All the windows had to be opened to a golden blueness that shimmered

over the city and the water. In the azure distance, lake steamers were burning black needles scattered over blue velvet.

An hour later, Thurston was bellowing rapid hellos to three girls who came in, each one seeming so beautiful to Davy that no expression touched his face. The short dark one threw her arms around Thurston at once. She was so slim and cute that Davy felt he could have held her in his two hands. The blond one looked at Ken and suddenly burst into laughter.

"Holy smoke, Fanny!" Ken took her hands for a moment. "I thought you were in the Follies or something back east."

"First of all my name is Fleur, and I *was* in the Follies." She took off her deep sequin-covered hat and ran her fingers over her boyish bob that was as slick as golden lacquer. "I've been trying to get back home for the past six months for a visit to the folks, but there are as many parties going on here as there are in New York. Wherever you go in this country is one big party."

Davy looked at her vaguely, remembering Fanny Inkerman of the five-and-dime, but the tall dark girl was waiting for him to light her cigarette. She had shy eyes.

"Aren't you ever going to say hello?" she asked. "My name is Rosalind."

But Thurston was already booming out directions and suggestions. He had arms to put around every girl—they were all his, and each of his hands seemed to be full of drinks. His face was red, desperate and laughing, while his eyes looked as if he were on the point of tears.

"Come on, come on!" he shouted. "Let's go, everybody. Let's make this one for the books!"

Two days later, in gray splattering rain, the Pierce limousine headed north again with wings of water splashing away from the tires. Thurston's face was ashen and flabby. He sat up front next to his chauffeur as if he didn't want to see or be seen by anyone. Ken sat by one of the windows, staring out as he gripped the tasseled hand loop. "My God," was all he could say from time to time. Davy kept his eyes closed. He was sick, ashamed of himself, of what he had seen and done, and yet he felt tenderly towards all the girls. He was even a little in love with Rosalind and he wanted the party to start all over again—tonight—now.

They rode all the way to Wickersham with no word being exchanged between them except for a mumbled, "Thanks, Mr. Thurston,"

as they got out at the garage. The following day, though, Brock called and said, "Well, you certainly put it over, boys. I've got Archie's check. I want to thank you both."

Davy could not suppress his curiosity. "How much did he put up?" "Eight thousand."

Davy's smile was crooked as he put the receiver back on the hook. "We can be kind of proud, Ken," he said bitterly. "Now we come higher than the prettiest girls in Milwaukee."

On the fifteenth of June, 1926, the Wickersham Research Corporation was brought into existence with a capitalization of twenty-five thousand dollars. The president was Kenneth Mallory. David Mallory was vice-president and Frederick Kinsman Brock was secretary-treasurer. The Mallorys between them owned fifty-one per cent of the stock, and they were each to draw two hundred and fifty dollars a month as salary.

The fifteenth of June fell on a warm Tuesday, and on the sixteenth of June, Dow Bros., Tailors, showed on their order book: *Mr. Kenneth Mallory — 1 lounge suit d.b. herringbone #22058 — \$75. To be ready June 20. Brown.*

5

By July, Thurston's party was a memory squeezed beneath the press of work. The new money bought equipment that opened other avenues for research. From time to time, though, Davy found himself recalling that perfumed excursion into the fabulous world where Thurston had distributed twenty-dollar bills as if they were coupons. He thought of Rosalind too, but distantly, as if he were remembering snatches of words seen on handbills blown on the wind.

Yet one night, he awoke suddenly in the darkness and for a moment he thought he was back in the suite at the Farrington Hotel with Rosalind beside him. The sweet elusiveness of perfume was in his nostrils and he put out his hand for her but his knuckles collided with the walls of his bunk at home. A hand on his shoulder shook him again. Ken was bending over him in the darkness. Davy sat up at once.

"What's the matter?" he asked. His mouth was thick with sleep. "What time is it?"

"Nothing's the matter," said Ken. "It's only two o'clock."

He sat down on Davy's bunk and the perfumed scents that had

stirred the dream into being came from Ken's new suit, in dapper silhouette against the moonlit window.

"Davy, listen; did Vicky call me or come down?"

"No. Why, did something happen?"

"Are you sure she didn't call? Where were you all night?"

"I was repairing the diffusion pump. For God's sake, Ken, what's up? Who were you out with? I can smell her all over you!"

"I was out with Fanny—Fleur. She's in town and she called me. You weren't around and I just didn't tell you."

"Where'd you get the money?"

"I tell you she came to see me," Ken said impatiently. He stood up. "Vicky saw us. She was working late, and she crossed the street right in front of us. She looked at the car and I could see her recognize it. Then she saw Fan. She looked straight at me and went on just as if she hadn't seen anything at all."

"Well?"

"Well, luckily the top was up so she couldn't have been absolutely sure it was me. It could have been you driving, Davy. It's *got* to be you! I want you to tell her that tomorrow."

"Oh, for God's sake!" Davy said in disgust. "Is *that* why you woke me up? What difference does it make if she saw you? You know you don't really give a damn."

"But I do!" Ken insisted desperately. "I swear that I do. I didn't think much about her the past couple of weeks, but when she looked at me that way, I felt sick. I've been going crazy all evening."

"You smell as if you were worrying!"

"God, you're stupid!" Ken said with bitterness. "The more angry I got with myself about Vicky, the faster things happened with Fan. And don't tell me it doesn't make sense."

"I'll tell you what makes sense: you don't give a damn about Vicky any more and now you've got to tell her." Fury suddenly possessed him. "Let me sleep, damn you!" he shouted.

"Davy, listen—" Ken sat down on the bunk, chastened by Davy's anger. His face was a black, soberly handsome profile, with a shadowed light in his eyes and on his cheek. "I can't break up with Vicky. If I do, something terrible will happen to me; I don't know what it is, but I'm scared. Of all the girls I ever knew, she's the only one I ever felt really easy with inside me. She may be only a kid now, but she's going to grow up, and if I don't marry her, I tell you, I'll be sort of committing suicide. I can feel it!"

"Marry her?" Davy demanded. He raised himself to face his brother. "Who do you think you're fooling?"

"I'm serious. I swear I am."

"You are like hell."

"I'll prove it to you. And to Margot too!"

"What's Margot got to do with it?" Davy asked slowly. "You know what you sound like?" He threw off the sheet and sat on the edge of the bunk. He was on the point of blurting out the cruel insight, but instead he sighed and spoke only with sympathy. "Ken, ever since Christmas you've slowly been going to pieces. Since Christmas. Do you know that?"

"What's Christmas got to do with it?"

"It was Christmas Eve when you had that big fight with Margot."

Ken raised his eyes dully. He didn't know what Davy was talking about. "All right, I was wrong."

"No," said Davy. "It has nothing to do with being right or wrong."

"Then what are you getting at?" There was neither guile nor evasion in Ken's voice. He was simply blind.

Davy sighed. "Nothing, I guess. All right, Ken, take it easy. If anything comes up with Vicky, I'll square it for you."

"Don't wait for it to come up!" Ken burst out. "Take care of it tomorrow. You were in the car with Fan."

"I was in the car with Fan." Suddenly he demanded, "Are you going to be seeing Fan again, Ken?"

Ken carefully removed his jacket, and his movements made a grotesque silhouette against the faint light.

"I won't see her," he said at last. "Not if you fix it with Vicky for me."

"That's a deal," Davy replied, but he knew with a distant, helpless anger that even though Ken meant what he said, he was not going to live up to his word. And in the back of Ken's mind, Davy was sure, Ken knew it too.

Right after breakfast, Davy went up the hill. The early July morning was already hot. Instead of going to the workshop, he walked around the house to the front door. Vicky was just coming down the steps.

"The back door seems to be jammed," Davy said. "Or have you taken to locking up at night?"

"It's not locked," she replied, pausing with surprise. In her freshly ironed summer dress she suggested a small girl on the way to school.

"Did you knock?" she asked.

"I didn't want to bother him. How is it you were working late last night?"

She glanced at him sharply, her eyes so intelligent and skeptical that his pity turned itself inside out to become fear.

"How do you know I was working late?" she asked.

"I just took it for granted that you were coming from the store."

"Where did you see me?" The small girl walking alone to school across the back lots stopped when she saw the older boys waiting for her, but she took their greasy teasing smiles with contempt.

"What do you mean *where*? We waved to each other last night about nine o'clock on State Street. At least I thought we waved."

"The way you *thought* you were there? *I* was there, Davy. You weren't."

"I was, and Fanny Inkerman was sitting right next to me."

Vicky came down the steps very slowly. For a moment, he was so carried away by his desire for her trust that he gazed at her with pleading conviction. But in the next instant, he wanted her to see through him to the lie, and through the lie to the reason for the lie.

"Oh, Davy, you're such a fool. I know it was Ken with that girl." She came all the way down to the walk beside him, so that he had to look down at her. "I knew it was Ken and I didn't care because all along I knew something like that was bound to happen. Now you've made it all silly and cheap with your stupid lie. You're not doing me any favor, Davy, and if you think you're helping Ken, you're wrong too. Whoever told you that you could lie?" she said with sudden fury. "That girl was no more for you than she was for the man in the moon!"

"Thanks! And exactly what is my type?"

"Davy, I don't even want to talk about *you* right now, you've made such a fool of yourself. And don't start to hang your head!" she went on. "If you're going to tell a lie, at least have the courage to brazen it out!"

"Vicky — !"

"And don't *Vicky* me. Oh, go away. You make me sick. You *and* Ken. You both behave like idiots in anything outside your work. Damn you *both*!" she said wearily and walked out of the front yard. He went after her, taking her cool bare arm in his hand.

"Vicky, don't be angry. If it was all right before I made a mess of it, forget what I said. It was all my fault."

"It wasn't. You and Ken must have worked it out together or else

how would you have known? The only thing I have against you, Davy, is that you know all about it. But Ken is the one who really hurt me. And it's not because of *her*. I understand how that could have happened. Of course, it hurts, but then since I always knew that I'm not the kind of girl who could keep his interest all the time, I can't say that I'm honestly disappointed. I'm willing to take what I can get, but to be lied to makes you feel dirty."

Davy walked beside her through the hot morning. He felt lashed by her contempt, by his own awareness of his guilt, yet more than anything he was struck by the contrast between the generosity of her love for Ken and what Davy knew that Ken felt about her. She was so much more decent a person than either he or his brother that he was driven to angry shame. In her eyes, whenever afterwards she would think of him, it would be as he had been this morning: a bungler, a liar and a fool. Yet he refused to accept the entire burden — all this was as suddenly as much her fault as it was Ken's.

He stopped and released her arm. "All I want to say is just one thing — I'm tired of both of you. You're both knocking your heads against what you think is a stone wall, except that the stone wall is me. Don't either of you confide in me any more!" he burst out as torment captured him. "I'm the only one who takes it to heart and to hell with that! Ken deserves exactly what *he's* going to get, and so help me, Vicky, so do *you!*"

6

All that day Davy hardly spoke to Ken, and his brief, bitter report of what had happened made Ken's face somber. Ken left the workshop at half-past five and sped downtown through slanting sunlight and long cool shadows. He parked the Dodge near the bookstore a few minutes before Vicky came out. Here in the center of town, the streets were crowded with home-going automobiles and pedestrians.

At last Vicky came out of the store, her thin dress swirling slightly as she turned from locking the door. Ken sat sober and motionless at the wheel, insisting that she look up and see him through the hurrying crowd, demanding that the tie between them be strong enough to penetrate more than dust motes in a shaft of light. She went a few steps and then, as if in response to a nagging sense that the usual

scene contained something unusual if only she had the wit to search for it, she abruptly turned her head. She stopped for a moment when she saw him. Still expressionless, she crossed to where the roadster stood. She walked erect so that out of all that crowd no one but she and Ken knew that she was refusing to meet his gaze. He leaned across to open the door and she got in beside him without a word, but there was no recognition between them.

The car moved into the stream of traffic. Ken glanced sideways to see Vicky's hands folded quietly in her lap. The hands had a stillness that seemed to deny that they had ever stroked his face or pressed his arms still more tightly about her. Relief flooded him for he realized that he still loved her. He loved everything about her now that she was forbidding herself to him. For a while he had been afraid that he had stopped caring for her at all—that once again he was to be beset by that gray emptiness of a love gone dead, so that to touch the arm of the once-beloved was no more exciting than to rub one's own wrist. It was far more important now to be able to keep on being in love with her than to keep her love.

"Can we drive around a bit so we can talk? I've got a lot to say." He waited, but she had no reply except this persistent silence. "Davy told me about this morning. It was such a stupid thing I did, Vicky." She still said nothing, and a vague irritation began to mount in him, but so did his love for her. "Aren't you going to talk to me? You know I love you."

"Ken," she said, and he could tell that she had turned her head, either out of weariness or to look at the shop windows. "Why don't you just shut up for a while!"

He hung his head a bit, but within him he was smiling his pride for her. After the fuss was all over, they'd go someplace and eat. He drove out the north end of town and turned off the highway onto the dirt-track road that led to the high bluffs. No one ever came here except at night, and the grass in the clearing was flat from years of automobile tires and buggy wheels. Behind them the dark pines were tall and silent with the blue evening hush. He switched off the engine and turned sideways in the seat so that at last he faced her squarely.

"Will you believe one thing?" he pleaded. "Will you believe that I don't give a damn about that other girl?"

She still refused to look at him, staring out at the sunset stillness of the lake below them. Her profile had the distinction of pride, and for an instant he was able to see her through eyes much older than

his own; with that instinctive borrowed wisdom he knew that she would grow increasingly handsome as she passed into maturity. He was fiercely proud that he had fallen in love with her. Then he sensed that she was not holding her chin as imperiously as before and he gambled on a change in mood.

"You have to answer me," he insisted. "Sooner or later, we're going to have to talk. Vicky, will you believe that this girl never meant a thing to me?"

The distant vision that had given her strength finally sank behind some far shore and her eyes wavered. She looked down at her hands.

"All right," she said in a small husky voice. "Suppose I believe that."

"And do you believe that you're the only girl I love? I *know* you believe it," he said. "You take it for granted just the way I know you love me." He waited, testing her bowed silence as if it had delicate texture. "You have to answer me, Vicky. Isn't that the way we both feel about each other?"

He put his hand on her shoulder, and his heart shimmered with pity for the naïveté and innocence of her body, but she moved away.

"Don't touch me," she said quietly. Her eyes were suddenly crystal with tears. "Don't *touch* me. Just talk."

"But *you're* not talking. You're not saying anything, and I'll tell you why. There's really nothing to say that I don't know a hundred times better than you do. If you think you hate me, I hate myself worse. I could crawl out of my skin for what I've done. And yet all the time I love you and you know it. There's nothing to say because there's nothing to do. It's over and it will never happen again. I won't ask if you believe that because you know it. I know you do!"

"Don't *reason* with me!" The bitter words tore out of her. Her tears, he was shocked to see, were not heartbreak, or self-pity, but pure frustration. Suddenly she slapped his cheek so hard that his face stung. She slapped him again. "*Damn* you!" she said brokenly. Then she seemed to hear nothing but a delicate shattering of brittleness within her, and her eyes widened with abject misery. "Oh Ken — Ken darling. I love you so!"

She put her arms about his neck and rested her head against his face as she sobbed without control, without any dignity except for the clean honesty of her misery. But like a fist smashing through the tenderness he felt for her surrender, he was appalled.

"Vicky, baby," he murmured in her hair. "Please don't cry."

She couldn't stop. All she could say was "Ken — Ken — " But

finally she caught her breath and held him even more tightly. "I don't care what you do, Ken," she whispered. "You're everything I ever hoped for and never dreamed I'd get. I don't deserve anyone like you. I had no right to be angry. I always knew that someday you'd wake up and find out that I wasn't for you."

"You're crazy," he said, desperately wanting her to stop, for it was as if a heart held in his hands was beginning to falter an instant before death. He had to restrain himself from shaking her violently out of her depthless self-abasement. "Be angry with me again, Vicky!" he wanted to plead. "It's the only way I can love you."

"Every girl wants somebody like you," she went on. "Handsome and clever — and every week more that I have you is just that much more pure luck."

"You mustn't believe that, Vicky. It's not so!" He kissed her forehead, her eyes, but the passionate conviction in his voice kept moving further from his heart, which was now sinking into gray emptiness. He was beset by panic, for to stroke her back was suddenly no more exciting than to rub his own wrist; her hands around his neck had lost their magic — they were merely hot and clinging. He wanted to thrust her away because she deserved so much more, but he merely stared dully over her head. Better than anyone else, he knew there was no point in searching for his lost love once it was gone.

Yet, while he was holding her tightly, counterfeiting the small motions and protests of love, he was already planning his escape to his work that could continually absorb him, but would never ensnare him with the fine hooks of human emotion — where there was nobody's motive to understand, least of all, his own.

"Come on, Vicky, pull yourself together," he whispered desperately. "Davy's waiting for me back at the shop."

7

The hot days of summer wheeled slowly about the barn, each day full of its own changing sunshine and cloud shadow, its own breezes, field sounds and night scents, but nothing from the outside world seemed to penetrate the workshop.

On the cobbled avenue just beyond the closed doors, automobiles thundered their vacationists northward in order to make the lakes by nightfall. Downtown in Page Park, the lighted lampposts took on

their nightly vigil over casual love. The first green biplanes began to move out of the Vollrath aviation plant to the adjacent flying strip, droning like dragonflies in their trial flights across the summer sky. Norton Wallis crated up an engine and rode south with it in the heat of a baggage car to a place in Arizona where a youngish college professor was making tests with giant rockets. In Milwaukee, Fan Inkerman kept going to her unusual parties. In August, she ran into a very funny little man named Carl Bannerman, who kept her in stitches. Fortunately neither of them had any reason to discover that they had a mutual acquaintance named Mallory — Ken Mallory up in Wickersham — for they might have come to blows.

Up in Wickersham, the only time Ken ventured out of the shop was on Saturday nights for his weekly date with Vicky, but Ken was absent-mindedly kind because he was in reality living somewhere else.

That summer, he lived only in a remote unearthly landscape of insubstantial crags and peaks, where distances were measured in volts, not miles, where torrential streams flowed in amperes. That world was sealed in a twelve-inch cylinder of glass, the size and shape of a telescoped spyglass, whose inner region contained cunningly shaped scraps of metal and bent wires isolated in vacuum. He lived there with his brother Davy. There were no other human beings in that world and it was a time of icy satisfaction and empyrean serenity.

To Davy, the summer was a swift uninflected time in which progress in the shop was as palpable as the day-by-day growth of a spreading vine. He knew that Ken's immersion was due to much more than the problem at hand. Davy had seen Ken face the dead end of love too many times; and even though this affair with Vicky had been more intense and had lasted longer than any of the others, the end was exactly the same — a long desperate dive into depths where no glare of emotion, regret or tears could penetrate. Davy understood it all but said nothing. As far as Ken and Vicky were concerned, Davy had washed his hands of them; and now that his fingers were no longer sticky with their misery, his palms were dry of pity.

Late in August, Brock returned to Wickersham after a two-week inspection of his family's vacation in Maine, and he wanted Ken to bring him up to date on what progress had been made in his absence. He called one Saturday afternoon — perhaps because he was lonely — and suggested that Ken have dinner with him out at the Country Club. Ken accepted at once.

"What about Vicky?" Davy asked when Ken had hung up. "Aren't you going to call her?"

Ken frowned. "Gosh, I forgot. Look, be a sport and take her to a movie for me. Don't call—just go up and explain what's happened. I'll even leave the car for you."

But as soon as Ken had left, Davy paid Vicky the courtesy of telephoning her at the store.

"—And so he just had to go," Davy said. "It was business. But Vicky, you could do me a big favor. Will you go out someplace with me and eat? After that we could go to the movies or out to the Pavilion where there's always a new band."

She didn't answer immediately and then she laughed softly with an echo of sadness. "Davy, will you promise to make me an offer like this every time Ken stands me up?"

He felt his smile disappear, for he saw now that no matter how often he might claim that he had washed his hands of her, the taint was in his flesh, rising to the surface just as soon as the old skin had worn away.

He found himself shaving and dressing very carefully for her. On Ken's insistence he too had bought a new suit—not tailor-made like Ken's—at the Campus Shop. Davy adjusted the black-and-gold tie and attempted to roll the button-down collar exactly as he had seen Ken do. The coat of the gray flannel suit was cut high in front with short lapels, and he remembered to button it tightly all the way up. The suit fitted better than anything he had ever worn before and, as he turned before the short mirror, he wondered fleetingly if he looked at all like the manufacturer's advertisement of a smiling young man standing with one foot on the running board of a blue Jordan Playboy, a thick racoon-skin overcoat draped carelessly over his shoulders. But there was no resemblance at all, he knew. For one thing, Davy wasn't smiling. As he thought of the evening to come, his heart pounded into his nerves a dully sweet apprehension that was intolerable. If only he didn't *care*, he thought bitterly, perhaps he could have a good time, but now he looked forward with dread to the appointment—a dread made delicious by the secret fear that some accident might keep him from meeting her.

Vicky waited in front of the store, withdrawing into the shelter of the entrance to avoid the first swirl of the Saturday evening crowd. Ever since Ken had unexpectedly appeared outside the store to beg

her forgiveness, she found herself praying that the same miracle would happen again. If only she could wish hard enough, or look close enough, Ken would materialize again out of the crowd of passers-by, laughing at her because she had taken so long to find him. As her head turned from side to side she had a forlorn beauty. Since the spring, her face had become thinner. Tiny lines of blue veined her lids and made her seem to be watching hopelessness with wide dry eyes.

The Dodge roadster approached slowly through the traffic and a small part of her heart prayed, "Let it be Ken, God, and I'll believe in you!" But the prayer had failed so many times in the past that her recognition of Davy brought only resignation. When Davy opened the door for her, she looked at him expectantly as if he had brought a further explanation of Ken's absence, an explanation which would somehow prove that after all he truly loved her. But Davy didn't even mention his name and she was too proud to ask.

He took her to Bell's, the restaurant where the politicians and assemblymen came when the legislature was in session: a place of dark oak and stippled plaster, of heavily starched tablecloths and napkins. Fleeting, she sensed about her an atmosphere of comfort, of duplicity, of well-fed men quietly coming to terms at the expense of their friends—other well-fed men at some other table nearby. She was like someone delicately sensitive to even a trace of an odor that had once sickened her, for by this time she knew what it was to be the betrayed. She knew every nuance of the sensation—the blend of rage, hurt, despair and forgiveness—because one always knew that the betrayer was merely obeying the rules of power, whether the power of office or the power of withheld love.

She presented her face as a token of attention to Davy, but all the while she was aware that the frosted front windows made it impossible for her to watch the street in the unceasing search for Ken. She felt trapped. Unless, of course, Davy had left word where he was taking her so that as soon as Ken finished, he would come. Her eyes kept turning to the door as each new customer entered.

She wrenched herself away from the betraying falseness of the game. Ken was not coming at all. She forced herself to see through the eyes she had blindly pointed at Davy. From the same depths she dragged the rest of her reluctant attention to listen to what he was saying. She envied his complete immersion in his work. As if for the first time, she looked at his dark serious face: Ken's face put

together by a rougher craftsman. She wondered how it would feel to love him. With the same intensity with which she hungered for Ken, she tried to imagine herself pressing her mouth against Davy's lips; she thrust her arms about his neck and held herself against him. She sat on his lap and rubbed her cheek against his; she lay beside him on the couch in her grandfather's living room and saw herself languorous with the darkness, the caress of his hands on her body, the long silence between murmured words of endearment that were only shapes for the basically formless sigh of desire.

Davy interrupted himself. "Why do you say no?"

"Did I?"

"You were shaking your head."

She averted her gaze. "I was just thinking of something that wouldn't work," she said, for Davy had long ago disappeared from the vision, and all the time she had been with Ken.

Her eyes examined him gravely and she assumed, in her humiliation, that he was asking her to explain why she was such a fool. Before the interruption, he had been telling her how he was now convinced of a deeper importance in the work than appeared on the surface. If one looked at an electronic circuit as a nervous system, then both in radio and their own project, the basic circuits worked exactly like the centers of the brain that controlled hearing and sight. If it were possible to duplicate that much of the human mind, he was saying, then in the future —

Because she had remained silent he had mistaken her counterfeit attention for encouragement to reveal more and more of himself until she had said "No" without being able to explain what she had meant. Now she couldn't even fathom his expression — contempt, annoyance, or was it sympathy? To be so deeply uncertain was a lonely, frightening experience.

When she had first sensed that Ken was losing interest in her, she told herself that this was only because there had been something withheld — the ultimate magic, or what she had been led to believe would be magic. But now, she doubted that even the magic could hold him. She had no reserves, no pride, nothing but this utter desperation that showed itself in the impulse to interrupt everyone who spoke to her with the plea, "Make him love me again!"

"I'm going away," she said. "I'm going to Cleveland."

"For how long?" he asked.

She looked at him with surprise, as if she assumed that everyone knew her demoralization. "For good," she said.

He traced the design of the tablecloth and his face was very grave.

"But Ken's not the only fellow in town. That is, if it *is* because of Ken."

"Of course, it's Ken," she said wearily. "And he is the only fellow in town."

"How do you know? Have you ever looked at anyone else?"

"No. And I don't have to. But it just hurts too much being here. And if you're being hurt, you're a fool not to get up and walk away."

His gaunt face was expressionless, but his blue eyes were hard to meet.

"If that's how you really feel," he said after a moment, and now he was no longer looking at her, "I guess you'd better go away."

8

When Davy got home, Ken was still dressed, sitting at the kitchen table with his hands clasped tightly before him. He hardly stirred for a moment. Instead of asking about Vicky, Ken said, "We're going to have trouble with Brock."

"What kind of trouble?"

"He wants us to reorganize — on what he calls a businesslike basis." Ken was pacing. "He means we've got to stop acting like a research team and look like an industrial outfit. More people on the job get results faster, he thinks. The capitalization was figured out on that basis, he says."

Davy checked an impulse to argue and simply asked, "What did you say?"

"I said what I thought. Until we know exactly in what direction to go, we won't know what kind of people we'll need. Up to a point he was willing to listen; but I'm telling you, Davy, we're going to have trouble with that man sooner or later. He scares me. He doesn't give a damn about what we want. He just sits there and smiles. He's the coldest fish in the world and you should have seen him out at that Country Club! Talk about brawls — I never saw such drinking in my life. But Brock acted as if nothing were going on. When he was through putting the screws on me, he just got up and walked out,

practically stepping over the fallen bodies." He tightened his lips. "And Vollrath was there for a few minutes. Guess who he was with."

"Margot?"

"Yes, Margot," Ken said, and from his tone Davy knew that this, more than anything Brock might have said, was what had been in the center of Ken's mind. "She never once mentioned to us that she'd ever been out there, and yet you should have seen her. She looked as if she belonged there, as if she'd been going out there all her life. They waved to me, at least she did. I just nodded back, that's all. Like Brock. One small nod." He stared down at his hands. "You should have seen her, Davy," he repeated softly. "She was the best-looking woman there."

"Was she? Vicky's leaving town, Ken. She says she's going to Cleveland for good."

Ken raised his head with a blank expression as if Davy had capriciously changed the subject. "Why should she want to do that?" he asked.

"You don't know?"

"No. Oh, for God's sake, Davy, I'll tell her not to go and she'll stay."

"You can tell her. But I'm betting she goes."

His tone made Ken glance around with an impatient helplessness as if he were being unfairly beset at a time when he had a thousand other things on his mind.

"She's not going to leave tomorrow," Ken said at last. "I'll talk to her as soon as I get some time. In the meanwhile I made a promise to Brock. Can we get the camera tube's characteristics by Labor Day?"

"If we beat our brains out."

"Well, that's our job, isn't it?"

The first week of September was unseasonably cold. A gray drizzle of rain gave the sky a wintry look, but the workshop was warm with excitement. On the day of the final test, Davy started at seven-thirty in the morning. Since late last spring, six different tubes had been designed and they had all been complete failures; but each failure had cut down the number of remaining alternatives. They were left now with only one set of possibilities — either this present arrangement was right or else the very principle of electron scanning was all wrong. By the end of the day the question would be settled and they would know whether the tube now on the table would be the last one ever to be built — or the first of a long line to come.

Ken wore his usual work clothes, but he was immaculately shaved and combed as if he had come prepared for an important personal

encounter. To Davy, this was only another day, because all his recent days had been one long siege of tension. Without any preliminary, he started the photocell test. He applied voltage to the disc of mesh and to the empty collecting ring directly in front of it. The rest of the tube was left electrically dead.

The closing of the switches was more than a simple mechanical act: it was as if Davy had opened an inner set of eyelids so that he could now see clearly into the airless island of the tube.

He saw a smooth sloping hill of voltage that began at the mesh and slanted down hundreds of volts to the plane of the ring—a hill that was as solid as an ice-covered mountainside only to charged particles; to anything that was not electrified, the hill was as transparent as the sky.

Davy pressed the switch that ignited the carbon arc. A golden bar of light poured into the tube window and transformed the mesh into a disc of shining yellow.

The light hurled electrons from their atomic orbits within the fine mesh wires, but before the electrons could return to the mesh, they were already on the slope of the electrical hill, sliding down to the collector ring like a cascade of falling stars.

Through the curling smoke of his cigarette, Davy wrote his detailed description of this cataclysmic transformation of a world of light into a world of electricity. All the eruption, explosion and blinding riot was captured in a prose that consisted of only two numerals—the number that identified the intensity of light, and the number on the dial face of the microammeter.

He gradually weakened the intensity of the barrage of light. With each change, the meter needle swept across the dial face from zero and came to quivering rest in a new position. A graph of the results was compared with the measurements of the previous tubes.

“So far, so good,” he said to Ken.

“Then let’s try the scanning beam.”

“OK.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Just numb.”

Yet no matter how calm Davy might consider himself, whenever he turned on the electron gun in the narrow neck of the tube, his fingers always pressed gingerly on the switch because of what he was trying to call to life. Six times, so far, he and Ken had failed, but each time his hand still tingled with hope.

Instead of a complicated glass vacuum tube, he saw an island that was a bare stark plain. With the closing of the switches, one end of the plain heaved upwards into a single volcanic cone whose peak was a crater lake of electrons. Almost instantly, a narrow gorge appeared as a groove down one side of this mountain so that the overflow from the crater could pour down along this sharply defined course to the flatness beneath.

The closing of the switches also caused commotion at the smooth slope of the photocell end of the island where the entire mass rose high up from the plain to become a mesa. Then a second mesa heaved up immediately behind the first, its twin except that the slanting top sloped rearwards. The groove down the side of the distant cratered peak extended itself across the flat plain like a canal, coming to a dead end at the rear foot of the mesa.

Davy watched the meters and read the message of the pointing needles without any change in expression. The six previous tubes had failed at just this point. He turned a knob and changed the contour of the island so that the canal current began to spray smoothly up the slope. But the meters still said that no scanning current was reaching the crest.

"Lower the mesh voltage a bit," Davy said.

Davy held up his hand in warning when the upward cascade finally touched the electrical summit. The electrons were at last reaching the mesh. There the delicate step of balancing had to take place that would prove whether or not it would ever be possible to make their system work. Each particle in the canal stream must be made to come to dead rest on the knife-edge summit of the mesa, then either tumble forward into the photocell valley or slide back down to the rear collector. Meters attached to each collector ring had to give identical readings.

For two hours, the gaunt landscape was tormented, destroyed and rebuilt, and finally both meters read 65. Before Davy allowed himself to enjoy the sensation of victory, he disconnected and interchanged the meters to correct for any internal difference. In the new arrangement, both meters still read 65.00.

Neither Ken nor Davy suggested stopping for lunch. The world outside the barn was lost in the gray drizzle. At the Vollrath plant, the mechanics squatted against the hangar wall and ate from tin kits. In the office behind the thin partitions, Doug Vollrath was chewing a sandwich and talking to New York, where a September sun was shining and Chrysler had gone up eight points. In Thorne's department

store, Margot looked down at the rumbling crowd of raincoated shoppers while she waited for Doug's line to be open. In the bookshop around the corner, Vicky could not decide whether to cross the street to the drugstore for lunch in this downpour or to finish the letter to her cousin in Cleveland asking about a job. No thoughts of a job occurred to Brock as he peeled off his rubbers in the foyer of the Civic Club. Brock looked forward to his usual lunch with the ghosts of dead lumber barons, and only on the farthest fringe of his mind was the nagging reminder to call the Mallorys day after tomorrow to lay down the law.

The Mallorys had no thought of law, no thought of rain, no thought of each other as separate from himself. They were concerned only with the final step in the exploration of the small glass island from outer space.

Ken held up his left hand with two fingers crossed for luck, and with his other hand he jammed down the switch. Davy stood by his shoulder and together they watched the meters' final judgment. The rear meter needle began to swing slowly. Without any light on the mesh, the perfectly divided current reading had been 65. Now, however, photoelectrons were being emitted to the forward collector ring. Each emission should create tiny humps of voltage on the crest of the ridge and destroy the delicate balance, so that now more than half the scanning current ought to be sliding back down the rear slope. The increased current in the rear collector could be a direct measure of the light falling on the particular portion of the mesh being scanned by the beam.

Davy held his breath, praying that the needle would continue its swing and show the higher reading. He didn't care how small the effect might be, just as long as it was positive. This tube was already so far superior to all its predecessors that only perversity could make it fail now.

The needle tip swung over 56 . . . 58 . . . 62 . . . Keep going, he shouted silently.

The meter needle touched 65 — and the test began — passed over it and very slowly crept beyond.

Davy allowed himself to breathe.

. . . 66 . . . 68 . . . the meter needle continued its glide and came to rest at 70.3. Davy slowly let out a sigh of incredulous relief. Ken turned around. This was one of the moments for which they had been working so many years, yet his face was absolutely expressionless.

"I'm tired," he said, and then his face broke into a surprised smile that slowly widened to a grin. Davy watched him, and burst into laughter. Ken laughed too; at himself, at Davy, and at the entire world which he was finally holding in the palm of his hand.

They were so close in memory, pride and fulfillment that Davy wondered how he could ever have thought he had been angry or even annoyed with Ken in the past. Davy knew now he had never been alone even in his loneliest moments, for some part of Ken had always been with him and always would be.

"I'll finish the run," Davy said. "You check me."

When he sat down at the filters now, the apparatus was no longer inanimate. Everything he touched was a trusted confederate who had fought along with them, even these glass slides. What he and Ken had been through was so much the most important experience of either of their lives that every tool and every piece of glass involved in the experiment must forever after be instantly recognizable. He smiled even while he checked the results on a graph.

They had brought into being something far more than any trivial addition to popular entertainment. For here was a device that could operate as the most delicate judgment ever conceived. Any question that could be translated into properly designed circuits could be impressed on the mesh, and the scanning beam would find the response as a clear-cut *yes* or *no*. New mathematical computations were now possible; chemical processes which had been discarded as too complicated for practical use could some day now be taken out of the test tube and put into industrial vats.

Drawing a smooth curve to connect the dots on the sheet of paper before him, Davy wondered whether James Watt had been sobered by this same breath-stopping intuition on that day that he first watched his pulsating steam piston keep a flywheel in constant motion. Watt must have known, and to some degree, he must have guessed at the shape of his England fifty years later. James Watt had lived in a day when men wore knee breeches, hose and long hair clubbed in the back to resemble a wig — yet that was no longer ago than the allotted life spans of two men, one after the other: just two lifetimes.

Sitting at his rough table, Davy's sense of the instant past broadened into a sense of all time compressed and roaring past him . . . and yet, with an impassive face, he studiously page-numbered the graph and wrote down the date for future reference. More sharply than ever before he was oppressed by the minuteness of man's time on earth.

Davy looked up slowly from his completed graph, and he knew that the explosive, ever accelerating rapidity with which men had refaced their own world had been given still another acceleration this morning.

He handed the graph to his brother, remembering the night when he and Ken had come to terms on their future; the night Ken had agreed to sign up for the fifth year.

"Listen, Ken," he said seriously. "Do you realize what we have here?"

Ken glanced at the results with a slow smile. "It's as plain as day," he said after a moment. His smile curved. "It's practically written out here — one million dollars!"

Davy's eyes widened. He was startled and then chilled. Ken had either forgotten that night or he hadn't understood what Davy had just meant. The identity he had shared all day with Ken suddenly came apart like wet paper, and Davy realized that he was who he had always been: alone, inviolate — and Ken was what Ken had always been: his brother and a total stranger.

9

The mornings in early October were clear, cold and fine. The rising sun gleamed palely on a rime of frost that lay white on the fields, on porch steps and in the corners of windowpanes. By nine o'clock the white lace melted and the sky stretched higher than hope, soaring and blue above the scarlet-and-gold flares of turning trees. The sun continued to climb, and midday was like June except for wood smoke and leaf fires whose aroma was a delicate thread of astringence in the air. But early evening slid down again from the north, and the vapor that had risen all day from the lake settled into low-hanging mist that lasted into the darkness. Nine o'clock at night was sharply brilliant once more with crystalline stars in a distant frosty blueness; for the mist had settled into dew, and by the next morning the fields would be white again to the rising sun.

The supertime fog made the train shed gloomier than ever, coiling like steam up against the high tin canopy, diffusing every light in the station into opalescent smears. Automobiles drew up and turned away, like bug-eyed knights crouching over twin spears that clashed and interpenetrated in a tournament without sound or contact.

The 6:52 was southbound to Milwaukee in time for the eastbound

express, and the locomotive at the head of the train moved like a monstrous insect, feeling its way into the station by the long white antenna that extended stiffly from the cyclopean headlight, crawling on shuffling white flexible legs of steam that straddled the tracks. The coach windows, extending far behind, were the yellow segments of the body, each one sending down square shafts of pale gold.

Vicky, Davy and Ken stood stiffly in their slickers, huddling against the swirling damp. They watched the train come in without saying anything. At the last minute Ken had suddenly urged Davy to come along to the station and Davy sensed his brother's reluctance to face the end alone. With contempt in his heart, Davy agreed to go. When they called for Vicky together, both of the brothers greeted her with apologetic eyes, although the two apologies were for different outrages. Of the three people in the roadster, she was the only one who retained full self-possession, palely, but her head was high as she sat between them.

The wait on the platform seemed an interminable agony, although their voices were calmly discussing the weather, the punctuality of the train and what was the exact time.

"I might as well get aboard," Vicky said as the train stopped.

"That's nonsense," Ken said sharply. "There's a full ten-minute wait and you'll be sitting long enough."

She glanced at him with a look that had every right to be scathing, but to Davy, she seemed as if she were forcing herself to make one last appraisal of him to isolate the very essence of what she had found to love. Then she could carry it away on the train with her to turn over and at last evaluate the gem — or the pebble —

Davy reached the point where he could no longer bear to be the barrier between them. He stepped back to give them a few last seconds alone, although what there was for them to say that wouldn't hurt, he didn't know, unless it was to wish each other luck. Nevertheless, Davy felt that it would be much better if Ken were to say merely that, but Ken would have to say it sincerely acknowledging the fact that they might never meet again, that he had once loved her very deeply because she was a fine girl, and if he no longer loved her the fault was nobody's but his own. It wasn't Vicky who needed the comfort, Davy decided, it was Ken who needed to regain some stature in his younger brother's eyes.

"I better get some cigarettes," Davy said, throwing out the excuse as he moved away. "And I'll see if I can get you a *Vanity Fair*."

"Let me be the one to buy it," Ken insisted. "It'll take only a minute. I can do it faster."

Davy and Vicky looked after him speechlessly, and when they faced each other, there was an almost imperceptible smile of irony on her lips.

Davy put his arm through hers and held her tightly that way. "Listen, Vicky, if I were my brother's keeper, things would have been different. You're the best girl he's ever had, or anyone's ever had. You know that, don't you?"

"It's just that he's so terribly embarrassed," she said. "I didn't want him to come and see me off. He insisted." She sounded very tired. "I'd like to get on the train now."

"Before he comes back?"

"Would he be hurt?" she asked with weary wisdom.

"I think he would be. I'm still hoping that he'll do something or say something so I can like him again." He pleaded with his somber eyes. "Do *me* the favor, will you, Vicky? Otherwise I'm going to go on feeling like this about him for a long time."

"You'll get over it," she said.

"So will you."

"Will I?" The mild irony crept into her voice. "Did all the other girls get over it too?"

"Yes," he said. He wasn't going to cover for Ken any more. "They all did and they all will. Very nicely, too."

"Then that's a good sign." She held out her hand. "Good-by, Davy."

He took her hand and held it. "Then you really won't wait?"

"There's no point. There's nothing he can do or say that can make any difference. And I'm chilly."

He still held her hand, unable to imagine how it would feel when she would no longer be in the same town with him. Even if she never thought about him, at least in Wickersham she was never more than an hour away and if anything happened to her or if she did something, he always knew about it.

"Vicky, will you write sometimes?"

"If you'll answer. You've got two engineers working for you now. Maybe you'll soon have your own secretary. She'll write your letters."

He still held her. "Can I kiss you, Vicky?"

She raised her mouth and he kissed her. He had intended only to embrace her lightly, but the touch of her lips made him press her to

him and hold her for her sweetness with so much desperation that when she stepped away, her eyes were wide.

"That was a long time coming," he said. "That's the kiss I had in mind when I came down to this station a year and a half ago to meet the most beautiful girl in the world."

"Ah, Davy — !" she said longingly, but whether the infinite poignancy in her voice was for what might have been or for what had been wasted, he couldn't tell. Her voice just missed breaking, but there were no tears in her eyes. She took up one bag, the heaviest, just as she had done when she first arrived, and stepped aboard the platform. He followed, watching her delicately shaped legs, and wondered if he could ever stop loving her. He hated the weight of his love and he writhed on its hook, but nowhere in his heart could he find any eagerness, no matter how bitter, for her to be gone completely from his life. She turned and lifted up the valise that he handed to her.

"Good-by," she said in her tired voice, but she smiled.

"Good-by."

Then she went back into the train. He watched her, still feeling her mouth on his. He searched for some permanence in the memory but it faded into all the kisses he never cared for beyond the moment.

He turned and walked rapidly through the fog to the waiting room in time to meet Ken coming through the door with a new magazine rolled under his arm. Davy's face was drawn and his eyes seemed deeper than ever.

"She got aboard by herself," Davy said. "She told me to tell you good-by."

"She didn't even wait?" Ken asked slowly, without the slightest sign of relief even to Davy's sharp appraisal. "Didn't she say anything else?"

"Nothing," said Davy harshly. "What did you expect her to say?"

"Nothing, I suppose." Ken sounded empty. Something was broken behind his eyes, but Davy refused to see it or even to care.

He stepped past his bewildered brother and strode out to the parked roadster, without even glancing back to see if Ken was following him. He could no longer trust himself to hold back his bitterness, for he had lost the only girl he had ever really loved, and he had lost her without ever having had her. Even at this moment, she wasn't thinking of him, but of Ken.

The train pulled away with a sigh and a shout, and it was all over.

Chapter Six

Margot too had intended to go to the station to say good-by to Vicky; but at the last moment every thought was driven from her mind by Doug's return to Wickersham after having been gone for a month.

For the first three weeks of his absence there had been no word from him, and she had exhausted herself by living in taut expectation of a call or a letter in tomorrow morning's mail; but the tomorrows came and went and at last there was no choice but to face squarely the loss of his interest. It was at that point that he called from Washington.

"I've been looking up the trains," he said as if resuming a conversation from only a moment before. "If you can get down to Milwaukee in two hours, you'll be here midnight tomorrow."

She was dying to go, just as she was dying to thank him for calling, to scold him for neglect, to laugh at the very sound of his voice. She tried to collect herself.

"Just like that?" She made it come out lightly, thank God.

"I called you 'just like that,'" he protested.

"You know the answer," she said slowly because she knew there was only one way to stay alive, if his love meant life. "It's NO."

He paused for a moment of baffled silence.

"Having too good a time?" he asked.

"I'm having an awful time," she confessed honestly. "God, how I miss you!"

"All right, to hell with it." Exasperation was in his surrender. "I'll be there Monday in time for dinner."

The house was on high ground, clear of the mist that shimmered like a lake of milk in the ghostly autumn evening. When *Margot* came in, Doug and Mel were already sitting with drinks before the fire. A bulging briefcase was open on the table behind the couch. Doug glanced up with quick appreciation, but then he waved her to a chair. She

sensed that he had forgotten that she was coming. Her instinct then had been correct: his call two nights before had been only an impulse of the moment.

"I'm going to be around for a while," he told her, turning back to work. "Maybe months."

"Did your deal go through?" she asked slowly.

"Not yet, but it will! It will! That's what I'm telling Mel." He was full of an excited triumph. He faced the designer. "It's all set on the Senate level—they'll OK the order if the Army itself makes the request. Remember Pete Fitzsimmons? Chicken colonel? Well, he's our boy. He's back to major now, but he's the one, all right."

"Did he fly the plane?"

"Oh, he liked it, all right. He loved it. But he's got to be absolutely crazy about it. That won't be hard. Fitz is no senator, but he *does* want something. It just happens that he's kid enough to want the Bendix Cup."

"My God, you can't *buy* him that!" Mel said.

Doug laughed. "No, but I promised to buy him something just as good—a plane that will put him in the running! I was also in New York, and the day that the Vollrath Falcon wins the cup, Vollrath Aviation goes up on the Big Board, opening at 27, and you own ten thousand shares. I also offered Fitz ten, but he said no. You know what he wants—*really* wants?" He stared into the fire and there was a slight edge of contempt in his voice. "He wants to see a hundred thousand faces turned to him as he steps out of that ship, all of them with admiration in their eyes. Then he'll slowly take off his helmet, and his face will be serious—as if the noise didn't mean a thing. And he'll say with great sincerity, 'This was no sporting event for me. This was an engineering project—the only way the nation can determine which of its aircraft is best.' You know that phony look of dedication. But all the time he'll be lapping up what he can't bring himself to admit he really wants."

Margot and Mel glanced at each other with insight. Only Doug believed that he had been talking about another man. Yet the self-deception didn't make Margot love him less. She felt only more protective.

"Now since this is a promotion stunt," Doug went on, "a top executive of the company has got to fly with him."

Mel lit a cigarette before answering. "It's not going to be me. I've logged too many hours with only one real bad crash."

"I guess I'll have to be the one," said Doug, still staring into the leaping glow and thunderous applause of the fire. "OK then, this project is all we think about from tomorrow on. You better move in here with me, Mel."

Again Margot and Mel found themselves exchanging glances. Hers was wariness, and his was understanding.

"No," said Mel to Doug. "As it is I'm only fifty yards down your road. I like my privacy."

"Forget about privacy," Doug said. "Nobody's going to have any until after that race." Then he noticed Margot sitting there quietly, and at last he laughed. "All right, for the time being, stay where you are, Mel."

After dinner, Mel left. Doug took Margot back into the living room. He was still big with his triumph, although now he was thoughtful.

"I told you that I missed you, didn't I?" he said. "Margot, I'm going to say something you won't like."

"Then don't say it."

"I *want* to say it. Once and for all."

Her heart was beating quietly.

"It's this — I missed you, all right, but I didn't want to. Anyone else feeling the way I do about you would want to marry you. I suppose it's time that particular word came up. Well, I don't want to marry you —"

She had the sense to say nothing.

"I don't want to marry you the way I didn't want to miss you. I missed you but I'm not going to marry you. I'm crazy about you. You can have anything I've got for as long as you want, but that's the way it is. It won't ever be different."

"Why did you have to tell me?" she said finally in a very small voice.

"Because you may have guessed, but you couldn't make yourself believe it. Now you *can* believe it. Come on, Margot," he said roughly. "Let's stop kidding around. It's been like a game. I knew what you were doing, and I had to laugh at myself for falling for it because I admire your nerve. Now we've both had our laugh. Let's settle down. I want you to move in here, stay with me, come along with me when I want you — stay here when I want to go alone. I'm making it as plain as I can."

"The answer is still NO." She was almost mocking. "Plain NO. The boys and I are finally moving into a real house. It's even got a

lawn. Not much, but a lawn. Do you know how long we've waited for it? But nobody can say that I don't have the manners to return an invitation. You asked me to come live in *your* house? All right, I'm inviting *you* to move in with us. Same terms. You can share my room or have one of your own. You can have everything I've got as long as you want it — money, clothes, anything. Together the boys and I make over \$600 a month. I can afford you. But don't expect me to marry you. What do you say?"

"You're very funny!"

"Yes," she said. She rose and patted his face. "I'm the funniest little girl you know. Every trick I pull makes you laugh and laugh. Even this is part of the act, isn't it?"

He grabbed her wrist. "You damn well know it is!"

"And isn't it funny!"

"Margot!" he said, releasing her in exasperation. "So help me . . . !"

"But I do want to help you, sweetheart. I want to give you everything except my name!" Then she reverted to her usual voice. "Oh, Doug — Doug — Why don't you grow up and be a big boy!"

He stared at her heavily for a moment.

"Well, anyhow, now you know what's in my mind."

"I certainly do," she said, smiling slightly. "The question is — do *you*?"

By November though, she was back at the plant at her old job. There was no need to make the conditions she had made before because Doug was too busy to have any kind of relationship with anyone. That particular autumn, the air across the entire country seemed crowded with airplanes hurtling at top speed for new records — Los Angeles to New York, dawn-to-dusk from Miami to Chicago, London to Cairo. On Thanksgiving, Doug flew east for the Yale-Army game and returned, itching with discontent to get ahead with the construction of the Falcon.

Mel and Doug stayed on the job every night until midnight, and by Christmas Mel moved into Doug's house. The correspondence on the special construction was in itself a full-time job for Margot, but in addition there were the details of preparation for the stock issue — eleven million dollars.

At home, too, she had the harried sense that time was flying by with no one to notice. Ken and Davy were themselves so involved with their own work that they didn't seem aware that the new house was still practically empty. Days went by when she didn't see them at all.

She didn't even know what they were doing except that sometimes she could hear a snatch of conversation as they worked out answers to each of Brock's applications of pressure; Ken had taken to going out to the Country Club, but she couldn't recall whether he ever told her that he had become a member.

She was too busy with her work to think about anything else except to be stabbed at odd moments by a helpless panic that she was racing headlong downhill through time, feeling nothing at all and growing more and more estranged from the people who loved her the most.

Doug rushed off to New York just after New Year's on a clear cold day. Margot and Mel watched him from the office window. His helmeted head looked black and hunched behind the open wind cowl. The white silk scarf streamed back from behind his head like a knight's plume. The biting wind was so strong that the green Vollrath Phantom took off in less than fifty feet, shivered on a gust, and then rose steeply into the northeast sky. Margot watched it until the black speck was lost in the morning sunshine. She turned to find that Mel had finished a tumbler of whisky and was pouring his second from a quart bottle. His thin wounded face was haunted.

"Before I pass out take me home, will you?" he said. "No, wait a minute, can I come to your house? Just put me in a room and close the door. All I want is to catch hold of myself. That son of a bitch eats you alive. Do you know that?"

"I know," she said.

"He doesn't listen," Mel replied slowly. "He's not somebody you work *with*. You don't even work *for* him. He's sitting in a saddle right in the middle of your shoulders with stirrups in your ribs and a bit in your mouth. He raises the top off your skull and looks inside for what he wants like he's scrabbling around a bin of odd-sized nuts and bolts. I don't sleep; he just lets me rest the way you let a hot piston cool off. When he thinks I've slept enough, there he is sitting on the foot of my bed. He doesn't even say 'Wake up.' He just starts talking. Soon as that God-damned race is over I'm quitting."

"Why don't you quit now?"

He looked at her as if she were stupid. "He wouldn't let me," he said simply. "Do you know what he does to people who quit before he's ready to fire them? I didn't know myself until I began working for him, and then you begin to hear things. Back in the squadron he had a funny reputation, but then everybody then did things you do when you've got jumpy nerves. I just thought that he was a wild rich

kid who held a grudge a little longer than anyone else. But I'm telling you that this guy thinks he's God. If you cross him, you're committing some kind of sin in his eyes, and he'll get you for it no matter what it costs him or how long it takes."

"You're really drunk," she said coldly. "In twenty minutes, you'll be flat on your face with it. You can sleep it off in a spare room we've got with a bed in it. When you come to, I'll introduce you to my brothers. But don't you say a word to them about Doug."

He rose, swaying as he searched for dignity. "Can I walk out in front of the men like this?"

She turned the plant over to the foreman, telling him that Mr. Thorne's stomach was bothering him. She drove Mel home in silence. The neat little treeless street was so new that even the handkerchief-sized lawns were still mostly raw earth in front of the stucco bungalows. Before she opened the door of the coupé, she paused.

"Now listen, Mel. There are twenty-four houses on this street, and in each house is a woman about my age with one or two kids. At this time of morning the only men who come knocking on their doors are salesmen. So when you go up that little walk, you go straight. If you try to lean on me, I'm going to let you fall. Do you get it?"

"Sure, sure." His voice was becoming thick. "And I also understand now how you and the monster get along. Cold fish meets cold fish."

The bright little house was freezing, and the polished, uncarpeted floors gleamed brilliantly in the sunlight. For the first time, she realized just how bare the place was. She put Mel in the spare bedroom with the freshly painted blue-stippled walls. He collapsed on an old army cot, the only piece of furniture there. Down in the basement that still smelled of damp cement, she started a fire in the furnace and built it up until all the pipes above started clanking. Then she went upstairs and sat shivering on a radiator while she telephoned the workshop in the barn. Davy answered.

"I've got a little free time," she said. "Can you and Ken meet me so we can pick out some furniture? The house looks just awful."

"I might be able to come," Davy said slowly. "But Ken went to Milwaukee, you know."

"I didn't know. With that Fleur — Fan or whatever her name is?"

Davy laughed. "Whatever her name is, he went. He drove down last night. He's been working awfully hard, Margot."

"What's happening to this family?" she demanded. "Doesn't anybody even see anybody any more?"

"Well, you haven't been crowding around the family stove. Keep your shirt on, though. You'll see me, and I'll see you and we'll even have lunch together."

They arranged where they were going to meet, and then Margot asked in a worried voice, "Did I know Ken was going away and just forgot?"

"No," said Davy laughing. "Ken himself didn't even know until half an hour before he left. You know our boy these days, Margot."

"Yes, I suppose so," she admitted wearily. "Pick me up on your way downtown. I'll wait here for you."

From upstairs there wasn't a sound except the happy bang of steam, rollicking through the pipes of the empty house. She walked nervously back and forth along the floor, her heels clicking on the polished wood. Out of desperation, she started a record on the portable victrola, and a tinny little song racketed out as if gushing under a sustained pressure. The single notes bounced crazily against the bare pink walls, the virginal ceiling, the tapestried brick of the fireplace — all so new and thin — as if the music were racing crazily for an all-time record from emptiness to emptiness. As if the song — like the house, the street, the very course of her life — were too hopelessly far from what she wanted. In utter desperation, she turned off the machine with a violence that made the singer's last words hang in the air as a questioning, choked-off squawk of surprise — "*Ain't we got — ?*"

2

"*Hell*, I'm entitled to some fun!" Ken said impatiently to his seated brother. The tiny workshop office had been partitioned from a small front corner of the barn, and a window had been cut through one of the sealed double doors for illumination. Ken's face was pinched and yellow in the early spring sunshine and his eyes were small from lack of sleep. He must have left Milwaukee about seven o'clock to have driven up, Davy thought, but even so Ken was late. "After all, this is only the second time since Christmas that I went off on a tear."

"I wasn't counting the times," Davy replied. His voice was even, but with nervous exhaustion, not patience. "You can go away every week end if you want. All I ask is that you get back when you're supposed to. Three of our forty-five-dollar-a-week men have been held up since

Monday because you didn't show. Whatever else your little toot cost you, add on three days' salary for three men—and I'm not asking how much you spent on her."

"Whatever I spent on Fleur, she has coming to her."

"*Fleur?*"

"Yes, Fleur! Not Fan — *Fleur!*"

"OK. Fleur."

"Damned right OK. When I didn't have any dough, she used to come all the way up here just so we could go for a ride together and sometimes she even chipped in for the gas. Now that I've got a few bucks, the least I can do is show her a good time once in a while."

"Twice in a while."

"So it was twice, for Christ's sake! Spread the couple of hundred bucks over three months and what does it come to?"

"I'm not talking about the money!" Davy said in a suppressed shout as he slammed the desk. "I'm talking about you not being on the job when there's work to do. This is the second time I had to break an appointment with Stewart."

"Shove that! You know damn well you could have gone without me."

"I could have, but I won't," said Davy stubbornly because this was the core of his resentment. "No patent application is going out from Stewart's office with both our names on it unless you're right there to check every last word."

"But I did that," said Ken with irritation. "We already drew up our record of invention."

"We drew up two."

"I'm not counting your version, Davy. I still haven't changed my mind."

"A long time ago you and I agreed that there was going to be more to this than the one invention."

"That agreement called for first things first. We're still on the first thing. Our claims have got to be narrow, sharp and clear."

"Then we'll lose out in the long run!"

"Right now I don't give a damn about the long run!"

Davy had been looking at his own open palm, and now he let the hand fall to his side in resignation.

"All right, Ken, it'll be the way you want. We started this together and we're going to be standing side by side every time something im-

portant comes up. And if you can think of something more important than the patent application, I'll eat it."

"To hell with the application! Nothing's important except transmitting an image across the room."

"Don't worry. If we don't do it this month, we'll do it next month; and if not in May then in June. At least," he added dryly, "That's Brock's ultimatum."

Ken turned slowly. "When did he say that?"

"Yesterday. Soon as he heard that I'd postponed the meeting with Stewart for a second time."

"Did he sound sore?"

"He never sounds really sore. If we get an image we can transmit, he'll be happy, don't worry."

"I wasn't thinking of that so much," Ken said thoughtfully. "Brock's got a half interest in that new Chrysler agency. Maybe we could get some kind of discount on another car. I was burning oil all the way up."

"Is this the time to talk about that? Oh, hell, get a car if you want, but don't ask Brock for the discount, and don't change the subject. I'm talking about the conference with Stewart." Davy put his hand on the telephone. "Do you think you could make it this afternoon?"

"Make the appointment for right now!"

"And let people see you this way? Go home and sleep for a couple of hours, and you need a shave. I'll call you when I'm ready to leave."

"What do I have to go home for? I'll take one of the old bunks inside."

"They're not there any more. Yesterday morning I gave that space to Koster for a permanent glass-blowing bench. And while we're at it, I want you to OK an order for a stock shed to be built off what used to be Margot's room."

For almost half their lives, the small space in the rear of the barn had been their home. But like a creeping tide, the shop's growth had removed the stove, the chairs, the table, the mirror, the bunks, and with each article of furniture went all the dreams and memories that had been exchanged in its vicinity. Margot's old room was the last to go, and with it went all that would be left of a time that could never come again. But so much of their lives had been surrendered to just this purpose that Ken's hand moved across the sheet of paper without hesitation. When he had finished, though, he stood uncertainly as Davy spoke over the telephone to the lawyer.

"Two o'clock, then," said Davy, and hung up.

"If I take the car," Ken said, "how will you get down for me?"

"One of the men will drive me. There are six cars parked out there."

Ken still hesitated. "Did — did Margot say anything?"

"Not a word."

"Did she even know I was gone?" Ken's voice had an edge of bitterness.

Davy turned on him sharply.

"Did you go away to have a good time for yourself or to worry Margot?"

Ken looked at him without comprehension. Then, after a moment, he said, "Two o'clock?"

"Two o'clock," Davy said. He watched Ken leave and then absently sorted through the morning mail again. There was no letter from Vicky. Not a word since she had left.

A voice from several partitions away called his name and he rose to check the test on the latest feed-back amplifier. And after that — he shook his head, weary before the day began, with all that had to be done. Even with six other men on the job there was still too much to do. Davy felt exhaustion deep in the marrow of his soul. At every moment they seemed so close to final success, and yet each moment posed a million new possibilities. And each of the million possibilities could be broken down into another million fragments.

No wonder Ken blew up every so often. A gust of impatience thrummed upon Davy's nerves as he opened the door and he was wildly impatient for some kind of violent release. There was nothing here but drudgery, responsibility, with no elation to look forward to. On a hopeless impulse, he rifled through the mail once more, but he had been right the first time — there was no word from Vicky. She seemed to have completely disappeared from everyone's life but his.

3

The third time that Fan Inkerman telephoned the shop when Ken was out, Davy began to understand what had happened. The fruitless calls had started early in May, and now it was June — hot, green and golden.

"Ken's already gone to Milwaukee," Davy said. He almost said "to town" the way Ken would have. To Ken these days, Wickersham was

simply a suburb of a city seventy-five miles away. "He left about eight this morning so he should be there by now."

There was a moment of murmuring silence on the telephone. Well, all right, thought Davy, let her figure it out by herself.

"In the first place," she said, "I'm not in Milwaukee. I'm right here in Wickersham."

"I'll tell him you called."

"Don't bother," she said with a wry inflection. "Those messages you leave for him seem to be slipping his mind these days. But if that's the way it is — that's the way it is. It's just that I left a camera in his car some time ago and I'd like to have it back. Ask him to drop it as he goes past some day — if it doesn't interfere too much with his new friends."

"The camera's right here in the office."

"Then can I stop by for it?"

He hesitated a moment, then he said, "Any time. And listen, Fleur, I'm really sorry."

"Not Fleur. *Fan* to you — Davy."

He laughed softly. "All right, I'll see you."

He needn't have worried about her appearance. She came in twirling a white beret, and she wore a simple white dress. Her light scent was like a flower garden in early evening, and the girls out at the Country Club wore far heavier make-up than she had on right now. She slung the camera strap jauntily over her shoulder, but her fine dark eyes were full of rueful gratitude as she smiled.

"You do this like an old hand," she said. "Do you pull this for Ken all the time?"

"It *has* happened before," he admitted. Then he looked at her and smiled slowly. "You know."

"Sure, I know. But you make it almost painless. Does Ken do as well by you?"

"I suppose he would if he had to."

"But he hasn't had to, is that it?"

He shrugged, evading a reply.

She seated herself on the edge of his desk. "Listen, Davy — it's all over and I certainly know how to behave. But just between us — what's eating your brother? Who or what is it that he wants that he can't have?"

"What makes you ask?" he said warily.

She looked down at his sudden masking of himself but he knew that

she saw through him. "Skip it," she said, and got off the desk again. The movement of her body was all the more suggestive because of the loose line of the straight-hanging dress, but he knew that she was unaware of what she was doing to him.

"Davy, do me a favor and drive me downtown. I'm supposed to meet my sister." She saw his hesitation. "It's all right. Nobody in this town knows about me except you and Ken."

"Oh hell, it wasn't that," he said with sudden desperation. "I'm only sitting here making believe that the whole thing's not a bust. Sure, I'll drive you!"

On the way down, he asked her if she had ever planned to go back to New York and show business.

"Are you kidding?" she asked sardonically. "You didn't really fall for that line, did you? Well, why not? I've been telling it for so long I'll bet even Ziegfeld believes I once worked for him. Listen, Davy, come and see me sometime in Milwaukee. On one of my days off," she added as the car drew up to the crowded curb. "It'll be nice quiet fun."

"Sure." He smiled.

"I mean it. I think you're an awfully nice boy."

"Haven't you had enough trouble with the Mallory family?"

"Trouble? It's been no trouble at all," she said with wry gallantry as she got out. "It's been a pleasure — every minute of it." She leaned on the door she had slammed shut. "I'm not going back until tomorrow. We can go for a ride tonight out to the Pavilion and dance. And if you're nice and play your cards like a smart fellow, you might even get to hold my hand."

"Fleur — !" he said, laughing in spite of himself.

"Fan," she insisted. "What do you say?"

He felt a wrench of exasperation with himself. He was wearily positive that all he had to look forward to was another day of busy failure — another day with nothing to show except the expenditure of eight salaries and untold breakage. He found himself wishing the hateful day were already over. Nor did he have one moment's illusion that Fan was not doing exactly what every other girl before her had tried to do — to get back to Ken through him. But right now, Davy didn't care. All he wanted was a change from himself.

"It's a date," he said. "And thanks."

"Thank *you*," she said exquisitely and walked away.

He made the appointment, fully intending to see her just that once, to throw away an evening and then tell Ken about it on his return from

Milwaukee. But Davy awoke the next morning still smiling, as if the bright June day had already suffused him with its sunshine. He couldn't remember anything particularly funny that she had said, but he was haunted by such a sense of drollness that he could barely keep from telephoning to her, just to hear her slightly mocking voice. He was certain that she was feeling the same way.

When Ken showed up that afternoon, a little shamefaced, he avoided Davy's eyes and plunged directly into the work before Davy could say anything about Fan. And that excuse for a postponement was all Davy needed. That whole afternoon was so busy, as well as the next day, that Davy gave up looking for favorable opportunities to mention her name. His avoidance of Ken's castoff girls had always been so deliberate that this one lapse required some explanation. Pride would have made Davy tell the story with a deprecation that would make it impossible for him to see her a second time. She had been such a delightful change from the arid course of his recent life that he already missed her achingly.

The entire month of June was a bitter time. The work had reached a point where they were positive that the camera tube must be sending out some kind of signal. And they also had proof that the receiving tube could respond to extremely feeble impulses. Yet, day after day, a sharply defined cross placed in front of the camera tube made no impression on the pale luminous blur of the receiver screen.

Davy summed it up this way to Norton Wallis: "We have a creature with an eye that can see and a brain that can register a visual stimulus. We know that even the optic nerve is all right. Yet the bastard is as blind as a bat!"

For the thousandth time, they discussed the theory, the design, and explained to the old inventor the performance of each unit of the circuit. He had a hard, pragmatic mind that registered only concrete details. The subtlety of vacuum tubes was lost on him, and he insisted that a tube grid was only an electrical lever. But he was still eminently practical. He rose from peering at the worn blueprints and said, "You come out with only one answer — your camera signal still isn't getting enough amplification. If you have to, you'll just cover the whole damn floor with those so-called amplifying tubes."

Ken was silent for a moment. "The newspapers are advertising six-tube radios. Can you picture Brock walking in to see a *fifty*-tube outfit? Can't you just see that mind of his clicking up costs and trying to figure a way to market a set for a neat thousand dollars?"

"We're a long way from any market, Ken," Davy said. "All Brock cares about is a transmitted image on the screen. A fifty-tube circuit can be compactly arranged in a nice cabinet that Brock won't even look at."

"Don't kid yourself. Brock looks at everything. Last week when I drove him back downtown, he suddenly said to me, 'Ken, in the last two months you've been to Milwaukee six times.' Do you know how he knew?"

"You don't think *I* told him?"

"Nobody told him except the speedometer. New car — two months old — fifteen hundred miles on it. How many times does Milwaukee and back go into fifteen hundred leaving out local driving? Brock'll see, don't you worry. Talking about Milwaukee, Fleur left a camera in the car a couple of months ago —"

"Fleur?" said Wallis, glancing up. "Who the hell is Fleur?"

Ken hesitated. "A friend of mine."

"A friend, my eye!" The old man stared at him fixedly as his face grew crimson. "One of those jazz babies, I'll bet! Vicky wasn't good enough for you. A fine, sweet, decent girl, no!" He rose in his fury. "You had to break her heart and drive her away. You can pick my brains, but my own flesh and blood isn't good enough. I miss her, God damn it, I miss her!" he shouted. Choking with his seizure of insensate rage, he pointed his finger at Davy. "It's your fault — this whole thing. Your fault, just as everything is always your fault!"

Davy was paralyzed by the outburst, and he opened his lips in protest, but the old man stopped him.

"Your fault, I say! Didn't I tell *you* to go and meet her at the station when she first came? I specially said *not* Ken!"

"But I did call for her."

"You're lying!" There were tears in his blind eyes. "I miss her. I miss her. And she won't come back! Get out of here, you two —" He glared about wildly for a word. "You *bums*! You *and* your Fleur!"

Ken and Davy walked down the hill in silence.

"My God!" Ken sighed as they entered the office. "What are we going to do with him? He's worse than ever. You don't think he really believes that I drove Vicky away, do you, kid? Jesus, all I did was to mention Fleur's camera —"

Davy glanced out of the window.

"Fan's already got Fleur's camera, Ken. She dropped by for it some time ago. And the camera's in pretty good shape. At least it was the

last time I saw it, Saturday night." Still staring out the window, he felt Ken's silence. "I know exactly what she's up to, but I'm having a good time and I don't care. Now that I've told you, though, she'll look pretty good to you again."

"Are you crazy?"

"No. And neither is Fan. All you have to hear is somebody talking about her the way *you* used to, and then you start thinking. But she always gave the best of it to me! Now, you'd like to see her once again to prove it's still that way."

"Davy!"

"I saw it in your face, Ken!"

"Well, it's only natural, isn't it?"

"Maybe it is. But just lay off, that's all. I never asked you this kind of favor before — and it kills me to do it now. As for the old man, there's nothing we can do. There never was."

Ken gathered up the blueprints very carefully and started out of the office.

"I'll get the new circuit started right now," he said in a dead voice. That was his only reply and he didn't look back.

Davy had never felt so cheap in his life, and when he tried to take apart his sense of shame about Fan to divest it of its mystery, he couldn't find the answer. In all honesty, he knew that he placed no value at all on being the first man in any girl's life. Then why should Ken be the one man whose touch seemed to leave an indelible imprint that was almost a taint as far as Davy was concerned? Nor did he really believe that this distaste — for it amounted almost to that — stemmed from his fear that the girls were only using him as a means to get back to Ken. The inner aversion was far deeper, and cunningly hidden even now when, for the first time in his life, he tried to understand this side of himself.

He had violated his own taboo in secret, but now that the secret had been revealed to the high priest, Davy clung all the more violently to his defiance. He would not stop seeing Fan. Instead, he was more determined than ever to see her the following week.

Before the week was up, however, Douglas Vollrath appeared unannounced in their office at a moment when both Davy and Ken were calculating the constants of the new design. The crowded laboratories were made to seem impermanent and amateurish to Davy because of Vollrath's mere presence.

"I may have something of interest for you boys," Doug said without

preliminaries. He put his hat down on top of the calculations on the corner of the desk as if the papers were so much scrap. "We're building a test plane for the International Air Races at Philadelphia. We plan to carry a lot of different equipment to be tested during speed runs and we want to include radio. Can you throw together a special lightweight outfit that will send and receive?"

"We don't throw anything together here," Ken said shortly. He picked up Vollrath's hat and handed it to him. "That's not the way we work."

Vollrath didn't reach for his hat, but sudden anger reddened his face. "You know what I mean. I wouldn't have come if I didn't know you do good work."

"We do our *own* work," Ken went on. "We haven't done odd jobs for years."

Davy glanced at his brother and removed the hat from his hand, putting it down on a chair.

"We can't give you a definite yes or no," Davy said, overriding Ken's voice. "We're set to do a certain type of development. For anything else, we'd have to consult our backers."

Doug spoke directly to Davy as if Ken had withdrawn. "Here's the pitch. Our plane is going to fly in the Open. We'll be up against a bunch of over-age Jennies, Canucks, perhaps a Standard, Nieuport or maybe a Curtis Hawk. All old busses, souped up, stripped down and flown by the usual airport bums. And while the others are trying to squeeze the last tenth of a mile out of those superannuated heaps, we're going to be five laps ahead, casually giving out readings to a ground man as if we were running a routine test flight. Naturally everything connected with the flight will get a lot of good publicity."

"That kind of advertising is always good," Davy admitted slowly. "But maybe our backers will feel that the publicity won't carry over to our own product. To tell you the truth, I don't think it will."

"It's the name on the product that counts," Vollrath said. "And it's the name that'll be in the papers — Mallory Electrical Equipment. That just about covers everything, doesn't it?"

"And who'll be the hot pilot who wins the race?" Ken asked.

"The Vollrath Falcon is going to win the race," Doug said sharply. "As for the pilot, that's still not settled. We were trying to get a fellow named Fitzsimmons, but there's talk that he's going to be off with some Army Good Will Tour. In that case, we'll get somebody else as good."

"You, for example?"

"For example, me." Doug still looked at him with that enraging coolness and now he picked up his hat. "If it turns out to be me, and we take your equipment, you can come along as radio man and get your name in the papers too, if that's what you want. After all this is the Air Age, isn't it? Call me if your people are interested."

"Why, I think it's a dandy opportunity," Brock said. Davy masked his contempt when he saw how impressed the banker was. "It'll put this town right on the map. The winning plane comes from here — the pilot is a resident manufacturer of the city, and our own little outfit is right in there too. Don't see but this little investment of our time is the biggest thing we can do."

"It means postponing our own work," Ken reminded him.

Brock pursed his lips and glanced over his glasses; his signal for elaborate irony. "Well, I don't like to say this — but at the rate things have been going, I don't see how a few more weeks would even be noticed. By the way," he added pointedly, "Vollrath *is* going to pay for the equipment, isn't he?"

"Settle the terms with him yourself," Davy said. "For my part, I'd like to go on record against the whole idea. It puts us in the same carnival class with ballplayers, Charleston contest winners, and bobbed-haired bandits."

"In modern business, you need more than a product," Brock said impatiently. "You have to be *known*. I don't like this cheap sensationalism any more than you do, but if other people — important people — are letting down the bars, we can't afford to be left behind." He played with his glasses, deep in thought. "Naturally, there'll be pictures in the paper, so I'll arrange for a photographer to come down and snap us all — the corporation officers," he added quickly.

Ken and Davy walked out silently. Ken was furious, but Davy shrugged.

"Either we quit or just laugh, Ken. There's nothing in between."

Two weeks after the purchase contracts were signed, Ken was going through the morning mail. One letter he handed over to Davy without comment.

STATION WPI

Public Interests Corporation
Broadcasts in the Public Interest
Gambrinus Tower, Cleveland, O.
From the Office of the President

June 17, 1927

MR. KENNETH MALLORY
1711 EUCLID AVE.
WICKERSHAM, N.F.

DEAR KEN —

And Davy. Just a word to let you know that word has reached our ears of the Mystery Ship that's going to walk away with the Air Races at the Sesqui. Believe me, boys, your old friend and still partner was mighty proud to see your names in the paper. (Who the hell is doing the publicity?) The news item was pretty small, but eyes that look through the glasses of loyalty can find the needle in the haystack. Which is what this letter is about. I understand that the Ace (or does he prefer to be called Captain Vollrath) is to pass this way on his course in the On-to-Sesqui Assembling Race. How about him dropping up to the studio here for an exclusive interview? Speaking for my associates, I promise to do my part by giving a station build-up starting one week prior to his arrival and several of the local papers will be only too glad to co-operate.

We may be the biggest little station in Cleveland, but don't forget — they hear us in New York. This kind of publicity for the name of Mallory can do nothing but good in the promotion of that project which is nearest your heart and mine. Believe me, I will do everything to promote the angle of radio equipment on the flight.

With all best wishes for your grand success, I beg to remain (hoping you are no longer mad at me, because I'm not at you)

CARL BANNERMAN

CB/VW

Davy laughed and looked up to find Ken smiling crookedly.

"Now who can stay mad at that dirty dog?" Ken asked. "I really miss him. How did he ever get his hands on a radio station, of all things?"

"Do we show this letter to Vollrath?"

"We do not! We show him nothing but our silent faces. If Carl wants to push the promotion on his own, that's *his* business. What are you doing, memorizing that letter?"

Davy dropped it quickly, almost with the promptness of guilt. The typist's initials had meant nothing to Ken, but Davy's heart still lurched into breathlessness at any sign that might remind him of Vicky Wallis.

4

When Vicky had first left her home and come to Wickersham, she had been innocently following a mirage of love which had been shaped and tinted long before by the dreams of a tam-o'-shantered girl skating along Paramus Avenue. Wickersham to her was going to be a golden island in the sky, on whose meadows she would be met and instantly loved by a glittering youth whose smile was all gallantry and tender insight into everything she might feel but had never put into words even for herself. Yet only a year and a half after her arrival, she left Wickersham for Cleveland on a foggy October night, in pure headlong flight from the misery that was the fulfillment of that early dream.

On the way from Wickersham, her one longing was to be able to hear Ken's name mentioned without the constricting sensation in her heart—to be able to walk along a street without the obsessive certainty, always unfulfilled, that the next face to appear would be his. Fleetinglly she wondered whether things would be easier if he were dead. Even if she herself were dead—but she discovered that she had no wish to die. This side of death there would be enough paradise in the mere painlessness of no longer loving him.

She found that she was neither frightened nor lonely at the approach to Cleveland. Without having been aware of it before now, she realized that she was getting used to starting new lives for herself.

At the station, she was met by one of her cousins, Clare Egan, a prettyish woman of thirty with peevish eyes. Clare wore a fur coat and she was accompanied by her husband Matty, a thin-faced clerkly man with nervous silver-rimmed glasses. Matty took Vicky's bags and Clare took her arm, explaining that when the Sinclair cousins heard she was coming they all got together to decide who was to take her in; and since Clare and Matty had an extra room in their apartment, they were, well—the winners. In the next breath, though, Clare explained that the room would be needed in six months.

"She's drinking for two now," Matty remarked, and at his tone, Clare flashed him an angry look.

"Listen, I caught my condition from you!" she said across Vicky.

The Egans had a new black Oakland coupé that was beaded with cold rain.

"We're going to a party," Clare said. "Of course, we'll take you home first if you want, but I'd like you to come along and maybe you'll make some contacts. Popularity can't begin too early."

Vicky silently accepted the invitation. The last thing in the world she wanted was to be left alone. The city was a smear of lights in the rain, and Matty drove with precise care, murmuring steady curses at each traffic policeman and at every other driver on the glistening streets.

When they arrived at the party, tobacco smoke, hilarious laughter and the tinkling of a mechanical piano came through the spillway of the open door. Matty disappeared into the crowd of people, most of whom were at least his own age, and then returned with some tumblers full of a cloudy yellowish liquid — "Orange blossoms," he said, and handed one to Vicky. Clare snatched the glass from her hand.

"You dumb bunny, what are you doing?" she demanded of her husband. She turned to Vicky. "Have you had anything to eat?"

Vicky said she had eaten on the train and Clare, completely mollified, returned the glass to her. The radio was blaring above the voices, the pianola was whirling out a confetti cloud of paper-thin notes, but all sound gradually subsided as a tall young man came over to the piano and faced the room with a practiced vulpine smile that was softened by upturning corners of his lips. He began to sing popular songs in a high sweet tenor, and Clare whispered to Vicky, "That's Russ Richardson. He sings over WPI — not much of a station, but I understand they hear it in New York."

Then Russ Richardson sang a medley of college songs with dedicated sincerity, and the people in the room became as solemn as if they were listening to hymns. Clare said she was taking Vicky home because Matty was already so soused he was out necking Julia Hol-derson thinking she was Annie Case. And the only reason they were going to have a baby at all was to keep the marriage from going on the rocks, she said, driving through the downpour. Fine job to hand an infant when two grown people, one a college grad, couldn't do it between them. She was weeping through the mascara.

The boxy apartment was neat and clean. The living room had new tapestried furniture. Most of the floor was taken up by an elaborate set of drums.

"Matty's," said Clare bitterly. "Five hundred dollars worth — just to sit and play along with the radio! Look —" She pressed a switch and

a light went on within the bass drum. On the outer skin, there appeared in silhouette, ALOHA. "*That's* going to be a father!" she said. "You sleep in here, Vicky. Tomorrow we'll try to make some sense."

Vicky slept in a square bare room with blue-stippled walls. The echo of the evening's blare, chatter and sharp nastiness still resounded in her ears as she closed her eyes, but she wasn't unhappy. She found herself dreamily pushing her way through the maze of impressions and then realized that she was looking for something so that her passage took on urgency. She hurried faster and faster, feeling driven as she ran, until she stopped dead in misery as she came upon the object of her search — for there, high in the darkness of her mind, stood the image of Ken smiling down — and in that smile was nothing for her.

She was awakened by the sound of quarreling voices, and when her appearance could no longer be postponed she entered the kitchen. Matty's face was white, but very serious. The yellow table looked like a sparkling appliance display with an electric toaster, electric percolator and two other nickel-plated machines that were never fully identified. Vicky sat down, and Matty looked at her over a spoonful of soft-boiled egg.

"You type?" he asked.

"A little," she said, hesitating between the hope that he had a job to offer and the fear that the position might be in the office where he was an accountant.

"Well, typists are one thing this town doesn't need — that and flag-pole sitters. Of course, if you get a job selling gadgets, you got an A-1 customer here in my wife."

"What about those drums?" Clare demanded, tightening her yellow wrapper.

"Those drums were bought and paid for out of my mother's insurance money, as you well know! I wanted them all my life, and it was my mother's dying wish that I get them. You were there yourself!"

All that day, Vicky went from one bookstore to another, but nobody needed any clerks. For the next week, she filed applications at every employment office and department store. Finally, ten days after her arrival, she got a job as cashier in a cafeteria, grateful that she was on the night shift so she could avoid her cousins. However, Clare kept at her to quit, and when Matty heard of an opening in the office of the Rapid Transit, she went to work adding up the daily receipts of trolley cars.

She hated the job because the mechanical tabulation left her mind free to torment itself with thoughts of Ken. Once she suddenly found herself wondering whether this preoccupation was love or hatred. Of course, she hated him, she told herself with relief, and she deliberately enumerated every incident in which he had hurt her. She distorted the remembered image of his face into grossness and cruelty, and then ridiculed herself for ever having been stupid enough to fall in love with him. But at last she realized wearily that whether she loved or hated him made no difference. Until she just didn't care either way she would not be wholly free.

In December, she moved out of the Egans' apartment and took a room at the YWCA. She had no friends, and although she was sick with loneliness, she had no wish to return to Wickersham. Davy, she thought reproachfully, ought to write once in a while, but she was ashamed to write to him first. Occasionally, she allowed a fellow clerk to take her to a Chinese restaurant where there was dancing, but the boy was so fatuous that he made her angry. When one lunch-time she finally saw a round familiar face on the crowded winter street, she found herself smiling even before she recalled the fat man's name. The man, caught by the hopefulness of her smile, stopped and automatically tipped his hat before recognition brightened his eyes.

"Mr. Bannerman," she said. "Hello!"

"Hel-lo, little girl," he said with feeling. He took one of her gloved hands in both of his as he looked up into her face. "You think I don't remember you, but I do—I *do*—Hey, for God's sakes, you're—! Listen, are you mad at me, or am I supposed to be mad at you?"

"I'm not mad at anybody," she said laughing. "Who are you mad at?"

"Hell, I've forgotten all that! Are you married to Ken or something?"

As soon as she said she had left Wickersham some months ago and was living here in the city by herself, his eyes took on understanding and he drew her out of the street crowd.

"As much as I like to stand and look at a pretty girl, I like even better to sit and eat with her. Let's have lunch."

The old circus wasn't in town, he told her. He was with the biggest circus of them all these days—he owned a radio station. Well, it wasn't much of one, but they *did* hear it in New York. Exactly how he had come in possession of it, he didn't say, but she got the

impression that he had won it in a crap game. And with his broad experience in electronics —

"Didn't I take a correspondence course with two of the country's experts? Come to think of it, you and I are kind of fellow grads of the same institution. I should have known that anyone who fools around with skyrockets has to count on getting shot full of stars. I learned my lesson — Have you?"

She said in a low voice, "Well, that was a little different."

"Don't tell *me* about love." He was the first man she had ever met who used the word with so little self-consciousness. "I've been kicked out of every door in the joint. You ought to hear me hand out the old advice — two-fifteen every day — Dr. Mirado, Heart Healer."

"You?"

"Sure, why not? I'm also the Cleveland Crier at three-thirty with Fifteen Minutes Beneath Your Window. Like this afternoon, you'll be the story for today — Little Girl Ripped on the Buzz Saw of a Man's Ambition."

"You wouldn't!"

"Take it easy, I won't use your name. By the time I get through, you won't even know your own story, but you'll love that girl. What's the odds, kid, it's all entertainment!"

He handed her his newspaper folded to the radio timetables. Under *WPI 1345 kilocycles*, she read:

9:00 — Setting-up Exercises

9:30 — Morning Songtime — Russ Richardson

10:00 — Piano Selections — Muriel Gardner

10:30 — To be announced

11:00 — Midmorning Serenade — Russ Richardson

11:30 — Chamber of Commerce Talk

12:00 — Muriel Gardner at the Piano

12:30 — Dr. Mirado — Heart Healer

1:00 — The Ramblers

2:00 — Russ Richardson — Tenor

2:30 — The Ramblers

3:30 — Cleveland Crier

4:00 — The Ramblers

5:00 — Colonel Elliot Morgan — South Sea Exploration

5:30 — Russ Richardson at Teatime

"I'm Colonel Elliot Morgan, too," he went on, laughing. "Wonderful entertainment feature — the marriage customs of strange tribes.

Russ is Muriel Gardner. She never says anything—just plays. The marks write in and want to marry her. Sure, the whole thing is a con, but Russ and I get a bang out of it and the merchants are willing, nay anxious, to pay for time. Time! Imagine being able to sell a lousy few minutes when the world has been going on for a couple of billion years absolutely free! Can you beat that? Listen, we need somebody up there to make it businesslike—a smart girl. How about bringing your broken heart up to the studio? Have you got a job?"

She told him what she had, and he waved it away with derision.

"Listen, I'll give you thirty-five. In installments, of course. Things are slow and so I'll make it twenty-five every Friday, and the other ten gets banked for you like a bonus. Even if you were doing it for the kicks, it would be worth it. Come on, I want a smiling face around that barn."

"Do people really hear the station in New York?"

He looked at her amused admiration. "You hung around the Malloys too long, baby. Nobody here in Cleveland ever asked me that question. The truth is, *I* don't know. Nobody in New York ever wrote in and said they *didn't* hear us. You can hardly hear us in Cleveland, but people here like to think they're listening to us in New York, don't ask me why. It's made us the biggest little station in town."

"Did you start the story?" she persisted.

"It's not a story, because people believe in it. In this life, it's what people *believe* that counts," he said sententiously. "You believe you got a broken heart and it hurts you even though the best doctor in the world couldn't find a scratch. People believe in Muriel Gardner, and so there *is* a Muriel Gardner, just the way there is a Colonel Elliot Morgan, a Dr. Mirado and so on. In the days when people believed the world was flat, it *was* flat. Flat as a dollar. That's the basic fact of life, baby, and from that comes Illusion, Love, Entertainment. Take the job, kid, and you'll laugh like that every day you work!"

The Studio turned out to be not much larger than three cubbyholes on the sooty top of the Gambrinus Building. "Penthouse accommodations," Bannerman said. The "technical staff" was one lone engineer, who shared a twelve-foot square room with the entire transmitting apparatus. One whole wall was safety-glass window and, through its streaky texture, the entire city of Cleveland was stretched out below as if it were seen through a telescope that had gone badly out of focus.

"This is just where we start," Bannerman said grandly. "When you stop to think that Lincoln began in a log cabin, we're beginning more than halfway to the White House!"

From the moment she began, she was deluged beneath a constant rain of appointments to be made, appointments to be broken; calls to be put through, calls to be canceled; people to see, people to be avoided. She had no time at all to think of herself because the work went on night and day. She didn't even know that she was enjoying herself until one morning, about a month after she had started, she awoke as usual eager to get to the studio. Distantly, as she hurried, she was aware that something was missing, but it didn't seem to be anything so important that she couldn't look for it later.

Then she paused, and said aloud suddenly "Ken!" almost as if she were calling him. She said the name again—and felt nothing. Nothing! She began to laugh and hastened along with her breakfast. Ken—she kept thinking of the name in the way one fingers a healed bruise, amazed at the renewal of smooth skin. She tried to recall his murmuring voice, to feel his lips on hers. Nothing came. Nothing! Suddenly she was delirious with relief. She was, at that moment, stronger and more sure of herself than ever before in her entire life. In pure gratitude, she resolved to deepen her immersion in the work at the studio. She didn't care how long the hours were.

Her constant companion that spring was Russ Richardson, who looked something like Rudolph Valentino, but who wore regular collegiate clothes. At first she was awed by him because he seemed such a big star with his picture in the paper from time to time, but she realized shortly that he liked to have her with him because she was a useful foil when women made advances to him. He said he was saving himself for the rich heiress he was going to marry, although he had still to meet her.

Russ actually ran the station for Carl, and he worked tirelessly sixteen hours a day, for he was as dedicated to his career as either Davy or Ken were to their own project. To him the public, singing Russ Richardson was an article of commerce to be shaped, improved and sold by the watchful businessman he was at heart. At that time he was earning only fifty dollars a week from the station in commissions. His club dates came to another hundred. He lived on thirty-five dollars, but all the time he was preparing to earn two thousand. In his little notebook, he had already calculated that out of that figure he would net a weekly sixteen hundred, so that even if he extended his

scale of living, he would still be able to bank thirteen-fifty week in and week out.

He had everything figured out in advance. Some day, by chance, the national public would suddenly become aware of him. From studying the careers of other stars, he told Vicky, he had calculated that it should take no more than six weeks from the time he was first discovered until he would be photographed in the rotogravure with the champions of boxing and channel-swimming, to the ultimate accolade of shaking hands with Calvin Coolidge. For that reason, he knew what agent to call in when the lightning would strike, and he even had his contract outlined in his little black book.

Very clearly in the back of her mind, she knew that he was a fool, but she forgave him as if his monomaniacal drive were the least of human failings. What was most restful to her was that she was able to be with him and feel nothing. If he didn't excite her, he was also powerless to hurt her. She used to look at him with a tenderness which he did not see, but which was the quiet satisfaction with which one renews one's grip on an old umbrella on a day of sudden drenching downpour.

At times, though, she was saddened by the conviction that love had already passed her by, and that never again would she be able to feel the same boundless happiness that came from being in love and being loved. However, there wasn't much time for regret because Russ kept her so busy.

He took her to night clubs and speak-easies, where he didn't have to pay, and she would listen and grow sleepy as he discussed the finances of food and entertainment with the proprietor because, as a coming star singer, the best thing for him would be to open his own night club—"Russ Richardson's Rendezvous." He even knew which gangster he was going to have back him—that is, if the gangster wasn't killed by then—but Russ also had his second choice in mind as a precaution.

He didn't drink, and he was even rather strait-laced in his standards, but he knew who had shot whom, which syndicate controlled what judge, who was sexually irregular, which musicians took dope, where to get it; and he told Vicky all this with the unselective innocence of a country boy naming the species of weeds, crops and trees in his immediate world. He was obsessed with the idea that destiny had marked him. As a sign of his ultimate confidence in her, he asked her opinion as a book reader of the newspaper biography

he had prepared against the day when he might need it. The account of Russ Richardson's life went on for pages, an awe-struck eulogy of an American youth meant for fame: *Stabbing ever closer, destiny finally found its mark; and public acclaim came to Russ on —*

The biography stopped there on the blank date. The date was still blank in the spring. The irons that Carl had put in the fire were all cooled off, but other irons had been put in their place.

"Just a question of time," said Carl. "All we need is one good break!"

By the end of March, she was getting only fifteen dollars in salary. This was no reduction, of course, she was simply *lending* the money to Carl. Russ, too, was taking less; but in his case, she discovered, the difference was made up in shares of the corporation.

The first she heard of either of the Mallorys, was when Carl came to her desk and, without warning, dictated a letter for Wickersham. Then he showed her a small item in the *Press*.

RADIO EQUIPMENT FOR MYSTERY RACING PLANE

Radio apparatus is to be installed in the much-discussed entry of Vollrath Aviation for the National Air Races to be held at the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial. Full secrecy has so far surrounded all details of the plane, for which great things are promised. Mallory Electrical Research Corp. has received the contract for the special apparatus. Kenneth Mallory, president of the engineering firm, says that no details will be made public at the present time.

"All I can say," Bannerman remarked contemptuously, "is if that's the way they're handling the ballyhoo, they might as well wheel that plane into the nearest dump one midnight. What's in that story to make anybody give a damn?"

A week later, Vicky opened the reply.

DEAR CARL —

Thanks for the friendly word. For your information, nobody is mad at anybody. Our only connection with Vollrath Aviation is to sell them some special equipment. Any ideas you might have for promotion ought to be sent directly to them.

As ever,
KEN

"I'll *take* myself directly there," said Bannerman. "Here's something that's just crying for ideas. Isn't that the place where Margot works?"

Sunday morning, as the long radio church service was coming to a close, the telephone rang in the executive suite. Vicky answered.

"Kiddo, I'm calling you from Wickersham." Carl's voice was sonorous with triumph. "Pack your things and scramble up here. I am now working for Vollrath Aviation as special publicist. I repeat — Special Publicist! I told the Ace that I couldn't take the position without my usual secretary. That's you, baby. Leave a note for Russ when he comes in telling him that *he* is now president of the biggest little station in Cleveland —"

She hung up the telephone, and found herself shaking. The assurance of months was suddenly gone. What would she feel, she wondered, when she would meet Ken again for the first time — would there be an instantaneous renewal of imprisoning love, or simply that blankness which she had longed for so passionately? She tried to visualize his face before her, but beyond this panic she could discern no sign of her true feelings. All she could promise herself was that she would neither run away nor seek it. What was going to happen would happen, but it would have to find its own way to her.

The summer heat that lay over the countryside was intensified within the train, but nothing seemed able to touch the cold apprehension within her as she rode up to Wickersham. If only she were in love with someone else, she thought desperately — even mildly in love — then she could be reasonably sure that her emotions would be safely engaged for the moment she first saw Ken or heard his voice or felt his hand on her arm. She wanted to be in love right now — not for love's happiness, but only to be anesthetized against Ken. At this moment she wanted one of those boys she used to disregard in high school — the steady serious boys who felt too deeply about things, who used to make her impatient because she always suspected irritably that they were right. She found herself remembering names and faces she had never recalled before, surprised at how attractive they seemed in retrospect.

As the train clicked along, she hoped that one of them would suddenly appear — older now and more assured, but still capable of brightening wistfully at her glance.

She could already see herself walking side by side with the faceless lover, enjoying the silent warmth in serene enjoyment of her safety. She could even see herself, conveniently alone for the moment that Ken would appear. He would ask how things were, his eyes smiling with the quiet assurance that, no matter what she said, he was still in her

heart. And she, knowing with exasperation what was in his mind, would take quiet satisfaction in describing—oh very casually—her new suitor.

But not once did she realize that if Ken were to hear this other man—his complete antithesis—described, he would have every right to remark, “You mean someone exactly like Davy.”

J

Vicky was shocked by the change in her grandfather when he came to meet her at the station. She had written to him fairly regularly from Cleveland, less out of affection than obligation because she sensed how much she had meant to him; but nothing in his letters prepared her for the pitiful eagerness of her greeting. His eyes were wet as he embraced her. Then, after a moment, he held her away and peered at her. “You’re older,” he said slowly. “You grew up in Cleveland. How long do you think you’ll be staying this time?”

He sounded so humbled that she could have wept for his lost independence. He looked so fragile that he seemed almost transparent.

“I don’t know, Grandpa,” she said. “Maybe for a long time.”

“You’ll be working though, I suppose?”

“It was my job that brought me back here,” she reminded him gently.

“I know. I know. Still—well. Don’t go out too much with boys, Vicky,” he pleaded. “At least not with—you know who.”

“I’m all right, Grandpa, don’t worry. I’m all right. Let’s go home.”

The house was in almost the same neglected, musty condition as when she had first arrived. She said nothing, but went to work at once in spite of the old man’s protests that he wanted her to light somewhere just so he could look at her for a few minutes; she dusted, washed and scrubbed until eleven o’clock that night, grateful for the drudgery that kept her too busy to wonder at herself for returning. The old man followed her around peering at her fondly, moving only to get out of the way of her broom or mop.

In the morning, from the moment she left the house to report for work across town, she was caught up in an irritating uneasiness as

if at any moment Ken might suddenly appear. She couldn't bear the thought of being taken by surprise.

The office to which she and Carl were assigned was a tiny cubicle just large enough for two desks. Every time a man paused in the corridor outside, or merely passed, her hands would fall away from the machine until the silhouette had disappeared from the frosted glass pane of the door.

Twice she saw Margot, who had become much more tense in the past year. Margot walked and dressed differently these days. Even back in Cleveland, Margot now would have suggested the subdued crispness of New York. They had little time to talk because Margot like everyone else in the company was caught in the vortex of the coming race. Margot said nothing about Ken, and merely suggested that when the race was over, they'd all have to get together.

Margot seemed rushed and driven, and everyone in the office said that the only way to get anything done around here was to talk to Miss Mallory. Her sense of strained vitality permeated the entire plant.

Carl sustained the excitement without a loss of stride as he hustled in and out of the cubicle office, hurrying from one long-distance telephone call to another conference. She was so used to his coming and going that on the Friday after she arrived, she paid no attention at first to the sight of his shadow against the door. Apparently, he was standing there in conversation. But then his shadow moved over and another appeared: the silhouette of a younger, taller man. She heard the unintelligible rumble of their deep voices, rising and falling. Suddenly the younger man laughed. At the hauntingly half-familiar sound, she sat very still. The two men stopped talking, but the young man did not move away. An instant later, the door opened. Vicky had been so engrossed with Ken that she had forgotten all about Davy, who stood in the doorway, smiling down at her with ironic accusation in his eyes.

"You're a fine one! You never even called to say you were here," he said quietly. She could feel his dark gaze on her hair, her face, her clothes and her hands. "You've changed."

"I'm still the same."

"If you were, you would have called the minute you got off the train. I wouldn't have known you were here if it hadn't been for Carl. I've walked past this door four times since Monday without the slightest idea that you were right here inside."

"Four times?" she said, and then added, "Alone?"

From his quick intuitive glance she knew how obvious she had sounded.

"Alone," he said. "Ken and Vollrath aren't exactly crazy about each other and so Ken and I decided that it would make for less friction all around if he went on with our regular project while I finished off what we're doing here. But Ken's fine." He paused, still watchful. "What about you?"

"You've changed too," she said abruptly.

"Have I?"

"You seem much more sure of yourself — more positive."

"I am," he said simply. "A lot has happened to me."

"Good or bad?"

"A little of both." He smiled suddenly, the somber smile that she remembered; she was puzzled for a moment by a surprising familiarity as if only very recently she had been thinking quite tenderly about him or someone else exactly like him. She tried to remember just where or when that could have been. For the moment she could recall nothing, but she was grateful and relieved that he was here — as if he were doing her the one favor she had needed most desperately.

6

The last time Davy had taken Vicky to Bell's for dinner had been the night she made the decision to leave town; and not until now did he realize how little she had ever given him to love, as if from the beginning he had grown used to seeing only her half-averted profile, for even in their most confiding conversations, she had been speaking and thinking of someone else. Tonight, though, for the first time, he seemed to be looking directly into her eyes, feeling the warm excitement of all her attention focused on him. Only his memory that Fan Inkerman had once looked at him this way kept him wary.

Not once during dinner did he mention what was uppermost in his mind, but when he stopped the car in front of her grandfather's house, he turned and said, "I'm going to ask you a direct question — are you still in love with Ken?"

"No."

"That was a pretty fast answer."

"I had it ready. I knew you were going to ask me."

"Was it so plain?"

"You were going to ask me that when you walked into the office this afternoon," she said. "I would have told you then."

He put his hand on her wrist, and she didn't move away. His fingers were about to tighten to possession, reminding him that he had once reached out to Fan in exactly the same way and that she too had not moved away. The wariness that was his deepest self made him relax his grip. His smile was ironic as he withdrew his hand and reached across to open the door by her side. The gentle dismissal took her by surprise, but after a moment she stepped out.

"Good night," she said, and started up the walk.

Her own coolness made him glance after her.

"There'll be other nights, won't there?" But now his voice contained a plea that overrode a shocked inner scolding—*Davy, you fool, you're doing it all over again!*

"If you want," Vicky said.

"I do," he said quickly. "I do."

Later, on his pillow, her scent was faintly in his nostrils as if in the darkness she had just brushed by him. He opened his eyes, tantalized by the hallucination, until he discovered that the vapor was on his right hand from where he had touched her wrist.

The next day there was no need for him to be out at the Vollrath plant, but he worked in the lab, alert to every telephone call, hoping that he would be summoned for some conference and so have an excuse to step into Vicky's office.

Yet all the time, he was ridden by a sense that he had gone through this before.

Again and again that morning, he was on the verge of blurting out to Ken the news of Vicky's return, but his tongue was always stopped by the vision of Ken and Vicky strained together in each other's arms, by the imagined sound of their murmured endearments.

Just before noon, though, he told Ken, but Ken glanced at him so queerly that Davy's heart turned over with dread.

"I told *you* that," Ken said.

"You never told me she was here! How did *you* know?"

"Margot told me the other night. Have you run into her?"

"I saw her yesterday. Why didn't you tell me, Ken? I must have looked like a fool giving her hell for not calling to say she was back."

Ken's puzzlement was genuine. "Now why should she have called?" he wanted to know.

Late that afternoon, Davy abruptly dropped his work and called on the telephone, arranging to see her again that evening. After dinner, they drove out to the lake about a quarter of a mile above the Dance Pavilion, which looked like a fairy tent outlined by pin points of candlelight. In the summer night, the faint music sounded sweet and haunting, cleansed to thin purity by the darkness.

"Let's talk," Davy said impulsively. "I want to talk about you."

"Davy," she said slowly, "what have you been doing this past year?"

"Working, that's all. Why?"

"Because you've changed."

"Have I? That's what I wanted to talk to *you* about. Have *you* changed, Vicky?"

"You said I had."

"I know I did. I was talking about outside changes then. What I mean now —"

"What are you trying to say, Davy?"

"I've already asked you about Ken," he said slowly.

"I told you the truth, Davy."

"I know you believe it, Vicky, but inside — deep inside — is it really the truth? Or were you just saying it?"

"It *is* the truth," she insisted. "It *has* to be."

"If it *has* to be, then it really isn't — not yet anyhow."

"Ah, don't pick me up with words, Davy."

"But it's so important to me, Vicky!"

"Is it, Davy?" Her voice was low.

"You know it is. And I can't talk to you the way I would to any other girl because of Ken."

"But I told you that it was all over. I know you think of me as having once been Ken's girl. But *I* don't think of myself that way at all. I can't even remember how it felt. I wonder if I could ever make you believe that."

"God, I wish you could!"

"How *would* you talk to some other girl?"

He laughed a little. "I can't start off — just like that."

"Ah, try!"

"No," he said. He held out his palm to her. "Take my hand, that's all. Just hold it. That feels awfully nice to me, Vicky. How does it feel to you?"

"Davy, we were going to talk!"

"Don't take your hand away. All right, let's talk. I'll talk about what you look like to me."

"And this is what you'd say to some other girl?"

"No. Only to you." His voice was almost a murmur. "Vicky — look at me." He kissed her lips. "Vicky," he said again, loving her name.

"Davy, please —"

"Didn't you want me to kiss you?"

"I don't know —"

He looked at her searchingly, sadly. "That's what I was talking about all the time. I thought you were too."

"Maybe I was," she said slowly, looking down at her hands. "I'm not sorry you kissed me, Davy. I'm just all mixed up. Let's go down and dance."

"Do you really want to dance with me?"

She still didn't look up. "Yes," she said after a moment. Her voice was quiet. "I want very much to dance with you."

When they danced together there was a delicious compliance in her body and a thoughtfulness in her silence. After a few moments, her forehead rested against his face and then he and Vicky were no longer dancing but turning slowly and rhythmically in an easy embrace as if they alone held between them something so fragile and beautiful that they were to be treated with grave courtesy and respect by all the other couples.

After a while, Vicky did not release Davy's hand. Without looking up at him, she simply led him off the floor, saying "Let's go back to the car." But the true meaning of the words was in her tone, in the set of her head, for she had really said, "I would like you to kiss me now."

When he got home, he was humming softly.

"What are you so happy about?" Ken demanded from his darkened room.

"Nothing."

"You were out with Vicky, weren't you?"

Davy stopped humming. "Yes," he said quietly. Some of the brusqueness went out of Ken's voice.

"Did she — did she say anything?"

"About what?"

"Me, for example."

"I thought that was all over."

"I can ask how she is, can't I?"

Davy turned in the hall to face the dark doorway of Ken's bedroom, but he didn't go in. He looked down at his hands.

"About that flight test Thursday at Vollrath's —"

"I know," Ken said. "I'll be there."

"I was going to say that you didn't have to. I can get somebody else."

"Never mind. I said I'd do it, and I will."

"OK," he said aloud, but he didn't resume his hummings. The renewed interest in Ken's voice was like the key to a puzzle slyly whispered into his ear; and again he had the weary sense of having heard that tone before.

Davy went into the bathroom, where he thoughtfully and thoroughly washed his face and hands until there was nothing left to remind him of her. Whether she herself was aware of what she was doing, he perceived very clearly now that she was simply using his love. Yet because he missed the full truth by only a narrow margin, he was completely wrong; for with the directness of his insight, he assumed that she was doing this to get back to Ken. Not once did it occur to him that she wanted to use his love for a completely different reason — to escape from Ken.

7

On Thursday morning, Davy and Ken drove out to Vollrath's, ready to install the equipment. The morning was hot, still and sunny with all the green and gold richness of late July, and the sky was a high, thin, blue softness. When they arrived at the field, the specially built Falcon was just coming out of the air from a trial flight, quite small in the broad expanse of empty field. On the ground, the tilted fuselage had a vicious-looking stubbornness. Shirt-sleeved men started walking towards the tiny ship and they moved indolently through the liquid, shimmering day. Everywhere was the scent of hot grass. The aviator pushed back the transparent cockpit cowl, which glittered with sun-flame. Mel Thorne climbed down stiffly, and Davy and Ken reached the ship in time to hear him reporting to Vollrath, who stood on the ground in a white silk shirt and the threadbare golf knickers which he wore around the plant.

"She's smart, fast and able, and boy, you can have her!" Mel said.

"Don't you like her?" Vollrath asked.

"I don't like anything that flies—especially that flies fast. I broke a record, didn't I?"

"On that last pass. Did you have her all the way out?"

"No. She began to go stiff, but I have an idea what it is." Mel glanced at Ken and Davy. "I left you installation space just behind the rear seat. The chalk marks show how much room you can take, and I dummied in for you with the sandbags marked #3. That's the exact weight we're allowing you. If you've got your stuff here, we can weigh it right now."

The installation was made that afternoon. From time to time, Davy noticed Vicky watching them from the office window and he waved to her, but Ken appeared not to be aware of her at all, or for that matter, even of the mechanics whom Thorne had climbing over the plane to make his adjustments. The inside of the fuselage was hot and cramped. At two-thirty, the radio was set for testing with the engine turning. Davy withdrew to the office, where the ground set was located, leaving Ken in the plane.

The engine started at once, and even from the office, Davy could see the small metal ship shaking with the vibration as if it were covered with raindrops shivering in a high wind. Reception was very poor at first, but after a while they were able to filter out all the background noises. At four o'clock there was nothing left to do but to make a test of transmission in flight.

"Get Thorne to fly Ken," Davy said to Margot in an undertone.

But Doug Vollrath insisted on making the flight himself. He was in a cheerful smiling mood that would, Davy knew, make Ken only more irritable. Thorne signaled to Margot with shrugged shoulders that there was nothing he could do. From the office, Davy watched Ken climb awkwardly into the rear seat, a small white-shirted figure from this distance, and his unsureness was all the more marked by Vollrath's agility in scrambling into place. Davy glanced sideways at Vicky, wondering what she was thinking as she too watched silently from the window.

The engine started abruptly into its massive roar, a sound that made the air seem as solid as concrete. The plane moved forward slightly and then turned downwind looking like an arrogant bee, uptilted on the high insect-thin landing gear. Ken's voice, flattened and fibrous by electricity and vibrating metal, rasped from the office loud speaker.

"I'm beginning to transmit, kid," he was saying. "We're moving

down the field and I'm having my guts shaken out." Mockery was insidious, and curled his words ever so slightly. "If this is the Air Age, get me a horse and buggy. Can you hear me?"

"I hear you," said Davy, and threw the switch back for reception. He turned to Thorne. "Can Vollrath hear him too?"

Thorne nodded.

Still rumbling at low speed, coughing flame every so often, the small plane reached the end of the runway and turned around. The plane stopped after the turn, but the roar steadied and deepened. The little ship seemed to twitch with impatience to be in motion. Ken's sardonic voice was a ribbon that floated through the office like endless tape.

"We're bunching our muscles for the great leap into the Future," he said. "*Moddrin* science knows no miracle like this malted-milk shaker with wings. Is the Voice of the Future being heard?"

"I hear you," said Davy evenly.

"Tell him to shut up," Carl murmured.

"— could hear you too, if my ears would stay in place, but they're flapping up and down — Ah, we're beginning to move — faster and faster goes the winged chariot, not missing one single pebble —"

The windows of the office began to tremble and the ground shivered as the motor gathered more speed. A long plume of dust was thrown up behind the plane. The rear wheel rose and the small aircraft seemed to hunch forward. It ripped past the building with its front wheels clear of the ground, and a second later a blast of wind pelted the glass with small pebbles and grains of dirt. Flying low, level and fast, the plane passed out of sight, but Ken's voice remained with them, still railing but harder now as if he had narrowed his eyes and tightened his lips. His voice flattened with shock but then went on in even mockery as he described a high loop, then a spin, then another loop and another spin —

"And we are falling lazily through space — tighter and tighter — down towards the state capitol — the son of a bitch — Wait a minute, kid —" his voice sounded suddenly sick and tired — "I'm dizzy. You can hear me, can't you?"

"Good reception," said Davy. He whirled on Thorne as he replaced the switch. "What's that fool doing to my brother? Ken's never been in the air before."

The end of his anger was ripped up and shredded in the wake of sound as the plane hurtled across the field in level flight, less than

twenty feet above the ground. From the office they all watched it flash by in silence.

"Ken got under his skin, that's all," Thorne said. "That plane is like the boss's baby girl. You can't make fun of it any more than you can make fun of Vollrath himself. Ken's doing both."

"And so he's getting even, like a big kid!"

"Maybe so, but *he* doesn't think he is. The boss just believes that he decided this is a good time to try her out."

"They're both kids," Margot said angrily. "I just don't know whose diaper is wettest. Get him down, Mel, before Ken kills him!"

"I can't get him down," Thorne said. "He's going to —"

He didn't finish because the plane crossed the field once more and whipped them all with its solid flail of sound, then returned and lashed them again and again, until everyone in the office surrendered, and no voice was heard except for the unending curl of Ken's comment, and that too was momentarily drowned in the thunder of the plane's whipsaw passage.

On the landing, Vollrath climbed down and strode away from the machine without a backward glance. He came into the office, his face red, angry and silent. He riffled through papers on his desk, but his hands were shaking and he raised his eyes to no one. A few minutes later, Ken sauntered in with the earphones around his neck and the hand microphone hanging as a medallion on his chest.

"What I like about flying is the interesting bastards you meet," he announced carelessly. Then he looked directly at Vollrath and his voice turned crisp with insinuation. "I'm deaf, but am I heard?"

Davy said nothing, and Vollrath glared at Ken for a silent moment.

"All right, you tested your apparatus. Is it up to specification?"

"You got exactly what you ordered, Mr. Vollrath," said Ken. "You'll get your bill in the morning. Call when you need us again. Come on, Davy, and leave that set just where it is. It belongs to the man now."

He turned to Vicky for the first time and smiled — the radiant hero who had just won the war of the air, the sole survivor with honor. "It's nice to see you back, Vicky. You're looking good. Come on, Davy."

And Davy followed without even pausing to look around and see what damage had been done.

All evening Davy was on edge as if his fate were being decided by a jury with blind eyes and deaf ears. He hovered about the telephone in case Vicky might call, positive that he could tell from her first "Hello" whether she would ask to speak to Ken. He was as conscious of her as if she were moving about in the next room.

Finally, at ten o'clock, he could stand no more. If she wanted Ken, then that was the way it had to be. At the last moment, he said to Ken, "I'm going to the shop . . ." and then left without any further explanation.

Loneliness glowed in the air as soon as he turned on the light in the empty office. In the time he had been working on the aviation order, the staff had kept going on the original project under Ken's leadership. Davy saw the piled papers, the rolled plans, the half-completed sketches dropped at the end of the day's activity, but the activity had not been his and so he felt like an intruder. He walked through the laboratories, seeing apparatus he had not designed, circuits created without him.

He sat at the data book, reading through the progress made from day to day in the past few weeks. There were ideas here in which he had no part, problems he didn't know had arisen. He shook his head as he came across methods he would not have used, but the next page or so always proved that Ken had found the answer sought. These few pages gave an insight into Ken's pragmatic approach to creativeness, unmixed with any contribution of Davy's. This was pure Ken, and Davy had to admit that Ken was good, as if somehow Davy had allowed that realization to be blurred.

The sight of the telephone at his elbow caught his attention. While he had been sitting here, perhaps Vicky had called Ken, and those two had spoken softly to each other, each one smiling into the blind mouthpiece. And if she had called, Ken would never think of mentioning it to Davy. That conversation of rediscovery would be kept purely between themselves.

Davy saw himself as the central figure in an elaborate dance, moving now with Ken and now with Vicky; but when Ken and Vicky swung together, they moved off into the shadows to execute figures

which he could not see. But there he had to stand, frozen into an attitude of waiting until the cue came for one of the others to glide back and take his hand for another turn.

For the first time in years, Ken regained the stature in Davy's wistful eyes which he had had when they were boys—the shining conqueror who stood on some high eminence, the beloved one, the graceful one, the man whose palm was held out, casually cupped, as victory after victory fell into his hand.

The next morning at eight o'clock, the staff assistants all arrived within minutes of each other and, although Davy had been seeing them every day, he felt that he was returning for the first time from a long vacation. He spent the entire morning rechecking everything he had seen the night before, and by afternoon, the first trial of the new circuits was ready. At the last moment, a black cross was painted on a sheet of glass, and this crude picture was clamped in front of the camera.

Davy and Ken went into the darkened booth which had been built around the viewing tube so that no extraneous light could interfere. A very faint image was the best they hoped for. From his stool in the booth, Davy leaned down and threw the switch that made the six-inch screen of the tube become a clear moon shining in the wall. The opalescent disc of light was fairly steady in intensity, but faint wraiths of cloud swept across its face as if a gale were blowing on a clear winter night. Ken pressed a buzzer that called for a visual signal to be transmitted.

Suddenly snow whirled across the moon with a wild speed that made their eyes ache to watch. Some of the flakes were small, some were huge blotches that burst into view and then exploded; but far off through the storm appeared the only stationary thing in the blinding white pandemonium—the ghostly outline of an upright black cross.

After years of work and dreaming—a signal was finally coming through. For several seconds, Davy sat motionless. Then he lowered his head and rubbed his tortured eyes.

"Well," he said quietly. "You've got it."

"We have like hell," said Ken in a dead voice. "Maybe if we had something like this a year ago, I might have felt differently, but we can't show this to Brock. That's not twenty thousand dollars worth of anybody's money."

"It's the snow that's so bad," Davy said. "See if you can trace where it comes from. But whatever anyone says, you did get an image."

Ken called out the detailed orders. The storm on the tube face collapsed into the moon, and the moon collapsed into a pin point of light that wandered aimlessly like a firefly for a moment as the new connections were made outside, and then exploded into the glowing moon once more, and from the moon came the same whirling storm. This time there was no cross to be seen, for the electronic eye that had seen it had been removed. But the storm was just as bad as before.

"There's your answer," said Ken. "The interference isn't in the camera; it comes only from the amplifying circuit; it's too damn powerful." He switched off the receiving tube so that the booth was in total darkness. "Yet we need all the amplification we can get to make any kind of signal come through."

"But you're picking up the random motion of electrons in the first stage. That's what the snow must be, you know."

"Well, what was I supposed to do?" Ken demanded. "The signal from the camera tube is just about as small as the random movement. That shoves us right up the creek, as far as I can see."

"There's got to be a way out," Davy said slowly. "You ought to be able to find a way to sort the signal from the background."

"I don't see one." Ken was tired. "It's just as if you ask a man to write a message on a blackboard, and he has a terrible tremor in his hand. The random jerks of his wrist are as big as each letter so how the hell is anyone going to make sense of what he's written?"

"You steady his wrist, I suppose."

"But how? Every vacuum tube you use has some kind of random motion of electrons when you get down to the limit."

"Let's kick it around for a moment," Davy said. "Suppose *two* men with palsy hold on to the chalk at the same time. Each man's hand is going to shake, but not in exactly the same way. That means that one would tend to steady the other to some extent."

"What are you getting at?"

"Instead of two men with trembling fingers holding onto the same piece of chalk, let's have the two vacuum tubes receive the same signal and feed the same output. The random movement is only in the filament current, so we'll leave the filaments independent of each other. That's the same as having one vacuum tube with two different filaments: each one cancels out the fluctuations of the other."

"Let's try it," said Ken, beginning to rise.

"No, let's calculate it first," Davy said. He turned around, reaching for a scratch pad. Within him he felt the warm glow of reassurance. He *did* have a place here; he *did* have something to contribute. However capable and brilliant Ken might be in his own right, Ken could never be fully Ken without Davy.

It was already afternoon when Davy started the theoretical work, and so Ken decided to let the men go home as soon as the circuits had been restored to their original configuration. At seven o'clock that evening Davy was still engrossed in his pencil work, but Ken was beside himself with impatience.

"Well, what's the story so far?" he demanded.

"Two tubes in parallel won't be worth too much," Davy said, referring back to previous sheets. "Five tubes in parallel can cut the background down to one fourth."

"Then we know in what direction to go," Ken said impulsively. "We'll try ten tubes in parallel."

"Yes? With what constants?"

"How do I know? Throw the thing together and then play with it. Oh, all right," he added, getting the point. "You work it out. But I'm going."

"Where?"

Ken frowned at the impulsive sharpness of the question. "Why?"

"Forget it," Davy said, deliberately looking down at the papers. "I just wanted to know where to get in touch with you."

"I'll call *you*." Then Ken's voice softened slightly. "What about something to eat?"

"Never mind," said Davy. "I'm not hungry."

He heard Ken drive away, and strained after the dying sound wondering whether he could hear it turn the corner up to the Wallis house on Prescott Street. He waited and then forced himself to return to his work, plunging again into the clear world of number and function where there was never any ambiguity.

At eight-thirty, the phone rang. Davy's heart leaped with sudden hope; but it was Ken, not Vicky.

"I'm still not finished," Davy said shortly. "We'll have something to try tomorrow."

At ten o'clock, he was summarizing the conclusions of twenty pages of calculation into less than ten lines of formulas and diagrams. He was suddenly struck with the pain of hunger. He heard the outer door

open, and then Vicky stood in the entrance to the office, waiting for his notice.

"I saw the light," she said. "And so I came down to see whether you were working."

"Ken left only a little while ago," he said, but if she was disappointed she showed nothing. "I'm just finishing, and I'm starved."

"Come up to the house; I'll make you something."

"I was thinking of going to the all-night place on the highway."

"Can I come along?"

"Sure," he said quietly, and returned to his work, pretending that he had a few more lines to write. He would take her along with him, but he planned to get her home as soon as possible.

After they had eaten, he found himself heading out on the highway.

"For a little ride," he said, more for his own benefit than hers. The ride was silent all the way and came to an end on the bluffs above the lake. The headlights were off, and for a moment they sat in complete darkness. He turned to her as if to ask a question, but she had turned too and then they were kissing each other. Still in the embrace, she moved her head slowly from side to side as if there could be no ease for her until she had searched out the lingering kiss for all the meanings it might hold for her. He pushed the kiss to a deeper intimacy, and felt her stiffen in his arms. Then she clung to him, her cheek next to his, and she whispered in his ear with the tenderness of desire — "Oh, Davy . . . Davy!"

She murmured "Darling . . . darling . . ." but he could say nothing until, to his own surprise, his voice broke away from him and he whispered her name with such pleading fervor that he sounded, even to himself, as if he were shaken to the point of tears.

"What is it, Davy . . . Davy, sweetheart?" she asked.

"Nothing. Nothing."

"Say it, Davy. Say what you haven't said all night."

"I can't!"

"But you *do* love me," she whispered. Her hand caressed the back of his head. "It wouldn't be like this if you didn't."

He kissed her throat, but he was silent.

"Please, Davy . . ."

He said nothing.

"You said it the other night. The night we danced. You said you were making love."

"You said it was just necking."

"But now I love you." She turned her face so that she looked up into his eyes. "You know that I do." She laughed softly. "You're not going to be shy with me now, are you?"

"It's not that," he said. "It's not that at all."

"Then what is it?"

"I don't know. I just can't say it."

"But is it true?"

For a long time, he was motionless just holding her against him, and then he shook his head very slowly so that even while he lied to her, he would not be moving away from her.

"No, Vicky," he murmured. "It's not even true."

Chapter Seven

All the next day, he worked in a daze. From some outer shell of himself he gave orders, performed intelligent actions and made decisions, but his mind was far off in reverie. Then he would stand motionless until Ken's voice from across the room, or even Ken's shadow passing before him, would rupture the dream.

At those moments, Davy awoke suddenly, and continued with his work, never raising his eyes.

Yet it was only the unseen Ken across the room whom he hated; for when the Ken who was his brother worked with him, asked his advice, lent him an extra pair of hands, laughed at his dry remarks, there was between them only the usual comradeship that was mutual respect and dependence.

Late that afternoon, Vicky called, and the very sound of her voice made Davy's heart catch.

"Davy, I won't be able to see you tonight. I'm taking the evening train with Carl for that trip east."

"What trip?"

"The one I told you about. Carl wants to visit all the stopover places along the route east to the races."

"But the races don't start for another three weeks."

"I'll be back in ten days," she said.

"Can't I see you before you leave?"

"Not unless you come to the train. Would you want to do that?"

"Would you want me to?"

"You know what I said last night." Her voice was soft. "I'll say it again. Even if you won't say it."

"Vicky . . ."

"Oh, I'm not asking you to. To say it, I mean. But I'd be very happy if you came to see me off at the station. Very, Davy."

"I'll come."

"And it still isn't true?" she asked.

There was no doubt in his mind that she was being completely honest, and she really believed she was speaking the truth; but let Ken say one word or make one gesture, and Davy knew that would be the end. She would simply be going happily from one love to another, while he would plummet from illusion to emptiness. No, he still insisted silently, he knew more about her than she did.

"No, Vicky," he said sadly. "It still isn't. But I'll see you at the station."

The farewell was most unsatisfactory because he arrived late at the station. He could easily have left the laboratory in plenty of time, but he was steeling himself against committing all the sins of impetuosity which infuriated him so in Ken. Davy was determined that he himself at least would never give the appearance of putting a few minutes with a girl ahead of the work, particularly a girl to whom he could be no more than a substitute lover.

He got to the station two minutes before departure time, and he was glad he made it because the glimpse of relieved anxiety in her eyes was as deep an intimacy at that moment as anything they had shared before. They hadn't even exchanged a word before Carl bustled up to them, and took her arm like an outraged father.

"Get aboard," he said to her so sternly that she laughed as she hurried past him. The fat little man lingered behind for a moment as he glared his fury up at Davy. "You and your lousy brother, you're a pair!" he said. "Do you fellows think you're under contract to kick this kid around? She's working for *me* now," he said, tapping his chest. "*I'm* taking care of her, and anybody who wants to play around with her has got to toe the mark —"

"Now listen, Carl . . ."

"Don't try to con me, boy. Not where women are concerned. That girl is going to get a fair shake, or I'll know the reason why!"

He turned and hurried for the step of the moving train. Vicky waved down to Davy from a window in the middle of the car, laughing; but in a moment Carl appeared beside her, and pulled down the shade.

The following morning, the first trial was run with the new circuit. Davy arrived long before anyone. There was nothing else but work on his mind, and he was surprised to find that he felt only sheer relief that Vicky was gone. All his energy had come flooding together ready to overwhelm any obstacle that might arise; and he moved about the laboratory, checking the equipment with ruthless precision, for he was no longer the outsider he had seemed in his own eyes only the day before yesterday. Then it had been Ken who was the unassailable leader. Now, all the attributes of power were in Davy's possession, for it was Davy who had created the new circuit, and it was Davy whom Vicky had been seeking the night before.

The men were all assembled by eight; and within an hour, Davy and Ken were once more within the darkened observation booth. Davy sat on the stool before the receiving screen, and he had the heady elation of certain triumph. He pressed the switch, and the dead white disc lit up to become the glowing moon. For an instant of adjustment, the moon flickered, collapsed into a maze of lines like a slowly rotating tangle of luminous yarn, then merged again to wholeness.

This time, though, there was no hurricane of lunar snow. Instead there was only a drifting undulation of sea mist. Then Ken's buzzer called for a signal, and the rough cross splashed on the screen, rippling as if it were being seen through brightly sunlit water; but it was clear, sharply delineated and unmistakable.

"There it is," said Davy with quiet triumph. "Do we call Brock?"

Ken rose abruptly and threw open the door to the booth.

"Come on, take a look!" he said to the staff, and there was laughter in his voice. "This is what we were talking about!" Before the men came crowding in, he turned back to Davy. "It's a thousand per cent better, but Brock's paying to see a moving image. This is just for our own satisfaction."

"But we know finally that it works," Davy said. He wanted the moment's importance acknowledged.

"Damn right we know!" Ken said, and stood aside to allow the others to see the results they had all worked so hard to get. If the

tokens of leadership had passed from Ken's hands, he didn't seem to miss them. As far as he was concerned, everyone here had a share of satisfaction and he was anxious to see that everyone got his due. It was at moments like this when Davy forgot that Ken's ease in giving went along with an equal ease in taking.

"Davy!" Ken called him over the heads of the men crowding past him, and his voice still contained an echo of some laughing remark he had just made. "You're near the phone. Call Margot and tell her to chase right over."

"She won't be able to get away."

"Get away from what? Listen, she's been waiting five years for this day. She'll be angry if you don't call her. I'll call her myself!"

He pushed his way past the booth and picked up the telephone, smiling with anticipation of the pleasure he was about to give and the congratulations he was to receive. The hissing of the massed arcs in front of the camera tube drowned out any sound more than a foot away, and so Ken's telephone call was pure pantomime. Then Davy saw his brother's shoulders drop slowly. Ken stood that way for a long time even after he had put the receiver back on its hook; and from across the room, Davy knew there was no need to ask what answer Margot had given to the news she had awaited so long. He crossed beside his brother, and took the telephone from his hands.

"We can give her a demonstration later," Davy said quietly. "What's the difference whether she comes over now or after work? It might even be more fun later — after this whole crowd has gone. Two men can do it."

Ken stared at him blankly for a moment.

"Not before six, she said. Vollrath's starting out today —"

"Well, there you are."

"Where?" Ken asked with savage bitterness. "I really thought this would be more important to her."

"How do you know it isn't?"

"She just told me, didn't she? Yes, two men can give a demonstration. Ask one of the men to hang around and give you a hand when she comes."

"And where will you be?"

"How the hell do I know?" He started off. "The show's over. Let's get everyone back to work."

By the time Margot arrived, however, there was nothing to show because once again the circuits had been ripped apart in a frenzy of improvement that started spontaneously after the morning's demonstration. Davy was alone when she came. But when she saw that Ken was gone, her defensiveness seemed to wilt, more from disappointment than from relief.

"Why does he have to take things so damn hard!" she sighed. "What difference does it make whether I came then or now?"

"Don't be stupid, Margot. You knew it would be like this."

"Of course I knew. Ever since I spoke to him this morning, I've been tired, just thinking of the way he'd be when I got here. After all, today was important over there too. *You* understand, don't you, Davy?"

"Sure, I understand, but sometimes I don't give a damn."

"Well, what am I supposed to do?" she demanded. "Unless I'm on tap every minute of the day, he thinks I don't care."

"Do you?"

"If I didn't, do you think I'd be over at Doug's?"

Davy looked at her with his dark amused skepticism. "I wish I could see that," he said.

"Some day I'll explain it to you," she said. She moved with the quick aimlessness that was the prelude to departure. "If there's nothing to show me, let's go. But you say it works?"

"It works," he assured her. "At least in our terms, it does. The basic principle is right. We proved that this morning. The next big step is to be able to transmit a picture of something that's moving."

"What's the trouble there?"

"Light," he said. "Come in and I'll show you."

The camera tube was still in its original mount. Directly in front of the small disc at the end of the tube was the spidery structure of the slide holder. He showed her the three-inch square of glass on which the black cross was painted.

"The picture we were sending was this cross," he said. "But to do it we had to shine these two carbon arcs on it. Like this."

He swung the arc battery into position, only six inches from the slide, looking like two hands about to close prehensile fingers on the blindly staring orb of the camera eye.

"If we can make the circuits still more sensitive, we can get away with less light. That's what we're trying right now, but we can go only so far."

"And then?"

He shrugged. "And then work on some other angle. Any ideas?"

"No," she said laughing. "You two left me behind a long time ago. Haven't you any idea where Ken might have gone? We could call him and meet him someplace —"

Davy's dark sad smile was gently chiding. "Look, Margot, you knew what you were doing when you didn't come this morning."

"Well —"

"Then stand by it, kid; stand by it."

"It's easy for you to talk," she said unhappily, turning away.

He followed her, and his smile grew more crooked. "You think so? Then you're not as smart as you used to be. Either that or you're not paying attention."

She glanced at him involuntarily, but his face was already averted; and so they went out in each other's company, but not together.

It's been that way for a long time, Davy thought; for all of us.

That first successful transmission of a still image had made everyone on the staff slightly drunk with inspiration. The very air in the shop was electric with spontaneous inventiveness, and the atmosphere was as gay as a party. Even a brief chilling visit from Brock couldn't break it. All that the banker saw, of course, was a shambles; but since everyone was so positive of ultimate success, Brock's disapproval was a sort of joke. A week was all they'd need — just a week.

Davy had never seen Ken so obsessed, and he did not understand the drive until he decided one evening to clean up the office and saw the four days' accumulation of newspapers, all of them folded to the same news story.

Davy tumbled the newspapers into the wastebasket with a gesture of contempt just as Ken came into the office. Davy's lips were thin.

"Just once," he said bitterly, "can't you do something for the sake of getting it done?"

The edges of Ken's smile froze with bewilderment.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"I'm talking about you! It's not the experiment you care about! You've put us all in that damned air race. That's all you've been reading. Just as badly as Vollrath wants to win, you want to come in ahead of Vollrath!"

Ken's smile shrank a little more as defiance and hurt came into his eyes.

"What do you care as long as we get results?"

"Listen, I want a partner who's working on the same thing I am, not somebody who uses the job to be fighting a duel with a man a thousand miles away. What happens if Vollrath cracks up tomorrow? What happens to your incentive then? Do you stop working?"

Ken laughed, and was completely at his ease again. "I'll stop only long enough to celebrate. Don't worry about your partner, Davy. We just have different reasons for working, that's all."

"And so some day we're liable to be going in different directions," Davy retorted.

The days passed and Ken's inspiration began to outrun performance. The improvements were not as startling as had been hoped, like the wild jokes that are screamingly funny only late at night. Ken still scrambled higher and higher, but more and more rocks came away beneath his grasping fingers; and the staff behind him moved sideways to protect themselves from the shower of stones and dirt until they were streaming along at the more orderly, less precipitous pace set by Davy.

Davy worked as hard as Ken and his urge to achievement was just as insistent, but while Ken was trying to race against the swing of one trapeze in a gaudy circus a thousand miles away, Davy set his own working clock against the dry, ruthless turning of ledger pages in Brock's office.

3

He was so immersed in his work that he was faintly annoyed when he received a wire from Vicky setting her time for return on the Saturday afternoon train. He was surprised as he realized that he hadn't thought of her more than a few times since she had gone. The memory of her face lifted for a kiss seemed to evoke no response; intimacy seemed isolated from all feeling. He wondered what had ever made him think he had loved her so deeply that the very medium in which he lived had not been air but the wish to be with her, to have her eyes look at him with the love she had been offering to Ken.

The liberation brought an awareness of his own indestructibility,

and only a paler aftermath of sadness and self-doubt. He tried to recall some quality that would make her unique among all the other girls he had ever had, but there was nothing beyond the memory of a more gallant giving of herself; yet in retrospect that very quality now seemed some sort of weakness. Then he shrugged, for whatever explanation there was to this unexpected dwindling of ardor, he felt only a sense of intrusion and unwelcome claim, for she plainly expected him to meet her train. Even though her arrival was a day and a half away, he began to feel pressed for the time he would have to lose.

When Vicky had first come up to Wickersham with her young boy's face and stance, lost and wistful among the crowd of better-dressed, more knowing girls coming up for the dance, Davy had had trouble in singling her out. This time, although there was no crowd of girls in which she could be lost, he still did not recognize her immediately.

Just as she had been star-struck then by the others, now she would have made the shrill crush of girlish prom-trotters stand aside in momentary deference. Her face was still that of a boy, but a boy living in a pageantry time when children smiled with adult knowledge. Her tiny, sharply slanted hat, fringed with her own short curls, mixed innocence and mischief in her eyes. The clothes she wore gave imperious aloofness to her stride.

She seemed a young woman of affairs, and Davy was abashed as she approached. He could not believe that he had ever touched this girl. Within the space of a few seconds, he saw that he had completely miscalculated himself, and by the time she was only a few feet away, he was again so deeply in love with her and so submissively aware of his love that he would not have been at all surprised if she had walked right past him.

She smiled when she saw him, and then began to laugh as if she could no longer wait to share with him a joke she had been saving just for this moment.

"See this hand," she said, stretching out her fingers and turning her wrist as if she were still bemused by this unusual possession. "Shaken manfully by Jack Dempsey. This other hand—daintily touched by Gloria Swanson. Both hands together—pressed by General Billy Mitchell. Around these shoulders—" she half turned, presenting her immaculate self for his embrace—"went the friendly arms of Gertrude Ederle and the mayor of Philadelphia. They were all there and I met them all. Davy," she said ecstatically, "it's just as if Carl took me to

the circus and then introduced me to all the clowns, the lion-tamers and the bareback rider. It was so wonderful and funny! I had the most marvelous time. He even bought me these clothes. That is — he got the company to buy them.”

“I was noticing,” Davy said slowly. Forever after, every plain thing she might wear would be touched by today’s star shine persisting in his memory. This girl, even after he had heard her familiar voice and laughter, could never have been closed in his embrace or gasped his name in his ear. No one could ever have touched her — not even Ken.

“Carl said that I wasn’t doing him justice because he had so many people to see, and so he took me up to New York for a day and had a friend of his pick these out. I never realized I was so beautiful.” She laughed at herself, but her teasing eyes pleaded with him for some acknowledgment. He sensed that she wanted desperately to be serious, but pride kept her from making the transition unasked. He was so confused himself by the shimmering reversals of his own feelings that he was unable to help her. “I almost didn’t come back,” she added.

“Then why did you?” He couldn’t even smile.

“Because I have no shame,” she said, making her appalling honesty sound like a lighthearted exaggeration. “I left early and came home to see you. Although to tell the truth I didn’t miss you so terribly much. Only at times.”

“You’re lying,” he said impulsively. “You missed me all the time!”

“No, I didn’t. And you didn’t miss me either.”

“Well, we had our first big success while you were gone. We were finally able to send an image from the camera tube so that you could actually see it on the receiver screen. Just a couple of lines painted on a slide. But every day we’ve made that cross come clearer and clearer.”

Her eyes widened. “Then you’re almost finished!”

“We’re only just starting. We’ve been trying to fix things so we can send a picture of something moving, but we’re nowhere near it yet. . . . I missed you terribly,” he said impulsively and, although the words themselves were a lie, his tone was the truth for he simply had to give in to the intense yearning to give her something precious of himself, and even at that he felt ashamed for having been so miserly. “All the time.”

“Were you planning to see me tonight?” she asked.

“Yes.” He hadn’t been, but now he was worried that something might happen to expose this second lie. “Of course I was.”

"Then as soon as I call Grandpa can I go home to your house and eat with you and Margot and Ken?"

He searched the echo of her voice, but she had said "— and Ken," as if Ken were just anyone at all.

"It's not the best time," he said. "Margot's all excited. Today's the race, you know, and she'll be glued to the radio."

"But that's just why I want to go. I was in Philadelphia through all the preliminaries, and now I want to see how it all turns out."

"But there'll be only cold things to eat."

"Oh, who cares! Margot's been saying that we all ought to be getting together and besides she'll *want* to speak to me. Davy, I was *there!*"

"Well, all right," he said dubiously. "But — but don't you want to change your clothes or something before you go?"

"I should say not," she said, taking his arm. "I'll just call home, that's all. I want Margot to see me just this way."

And Ken? he wondered. Why didn't she say — "and Ken"?

4

Davy and Vicky arrived in the middle of a three-cornered argument between Ken, Margot and the radio. The radio announcer's voice, hollow with awe, boomed through the toylike living room, intoning the names of the momentarily great among the spectators — a French channel-swimmer, the contender for the world's heavyweight boxing championship, a cabinet member, and a musical-comedy dancing star — while behind his adulation came the booming of airplane engines and the hum of human conversation, through which a man's bored voice distinctly said, "Gimme a light, Bob. . . ."

Ken was frowning, caught in the middle of a stride. At the sight of Vicky, his face lit up and he snapped off the radio, then came towards her with outstretched hands.

"Hell, look at you!" he said, with shining gladness.

The sudden silence brought Margot from the kitchen, her voice preceding her by a fraction of a second. She was wearing an apron, and held a pot in one hand. Her face was set in vexation.

"Ken, if you turn off that thing once more — Oh!" she said as she saw the new arrivals. Without another word, she crossed to the radio and turned it on.

"For God's sake, you *know* he's going to win!" Ken said with elabo-

rate patience. He looked at Vicky and Davy, taking for granted that they shared his contempt.

"I still want to hear it," Margot said. "The race starts in three minutes. How was Philadelphia, Vicky?" she asked anxiously.

"It was terribly exciting, and everyone's fine."

"She's eating with us," said Davy, but nobody paid any attention to him, for the radio announcer suddenly deepened his voice to bellying reverence and a heavy human roar went up behind him as solid as a battering ram.

"The entries are just getting into position to take off. They'll circle the course twice and on the third pass, directly overhead, the race . . . will . . . *officially* . . . START!" Then the radio voice was compressed to a machine-gun monotone for the announcer himself was famous — not as a man of original thought, not as an objective reporter, but because he was said to be the all-time fastest talker in history. "*There goes John Rogers Hoyt of Evansville known to millions as Jojo — the great steel-nerved Jojo Hoyt in his black Curtis Hawk — listen to that power, folks, it means speed speed speed! Right on his tail goes Volney C. Pickett of Miramar, California —*"

"I met him," said Vicky. "He's just a kid about eighteen, but that Jojo character was drunk all the time —"

"Was that also part of Carl's job?" Ken asked. "Keeping the other pilots drunk while you went snipping the airplane wires?"

"Sh!" Margot's furious hiss ripped through the conversation. Four more entries had gone into the air, and the name *Vollrath* had been spoken.

"— *the renowned sportsman-scientist-pilot in a green, mean-looking plane . . . the Mystery Ship! Can you hear that snarl? Pure power —*"

"Anybody got a cigarette?" Ken said artlessly, as if there were ten people in the room.

"Shut up," Davy said quietly, before Margot could sting him with her bitterness, and for the next five minutes they all listened in complete silence to the announcer's barking frenzy that was unable to hide the true dullness of the event, for the day was gray, the visibility poor, and Doug was almost a full three laps ahead at the finish, having pulled steadily away all the while.

"Surprise, surprise!" murmured Ken. "See what an enterprising lad can do with nothing more than the will to win, a few pieces of wire and some leftover parts."

Margot turned off the radio, ignoring him, and she seemed to be deflated into pure exhaustion.

"Well, that's that," she said flatly. "Anybody want to buy an aviation plant? Fifty cents. There'll be one on the market within four weeks."

But if she was tired, Ken seemed even more crushed, as if he had suddenly realized the seriousness of a commitment he had made to himself. He silently poured a drink while the girls went into the kitchen to prepare the food.

"So he really pulled it! I bet if I turned the radio on now, they'd still be raving about the new All-Time Champion of the Air Age. And here we sit, Mr. Flop and his brother. Well, brother, here's to us!"

The telephone rang — long-distance for Miss Margot Mallory. Her face was flushed and her eyes shone as she spoke. When she hung up, the radiance was there to stay.

"He called just to say that he had won. He didn't know whether or not we listened on the radio," she explained, but there was a tremor in her happiness. "It was so thoughtful that I can't believe he'd do it. Ah, what's the point of kidding, I *am* proud of him!"

"Did you tell him that I was proud of him, too?" Ken asked.

"Ah, Ken —" she said pleadingly.

"We have company," he reminded her with an airiness calculated to infuriate her. He turned and looked at Vicky thoughtfully for a long time. "You didn't use to be that pretty."

Vicky laughed, but she wasn't at ease. Davy felt a vague anger directed at everyone present. He couldn't bear to leave the room, and yet he knew that unless he helped rush the meal the evening would drag along, and he wanted to be able to take Vicky away as quickly as possible. He began to be aware, moreover, that Ken, whirling within his own desperation, was waiting for a chance to be alone with Vicky.

To hell with them all, Davy decided abruptly. If it's going to happen, the sooner the better.

As soon as Davy went into the kitchen, Ken turned to Vicky and said with quiet swiftness, "I meant what I said before."

"And you're right," she said coolly. "I didn't use to look like this. Ken, why do you have to pick on Margot that way?"

"Oh, brothers and sisters, you know —" he said in dismissal. He leaned urgently towards her, impelled to salvage something from a

sequence of failures. "When I saw you in the office after that cock-eyed flight, something happened to me, Vicky. What were *you* feeling?"

"Not what I expected," she said with a troubled frankness. "I didn't know whether I would feel just nothing at all, or whether it would start all over again. I was afraid."

"And?" He was pressing her, determined to push the confession through the membrane of her reserve so that he could warm himself once more at the center of someone else's soft core of feeling. "And what happened?"

"It was halfway between both," she told him. "But not enough of either to make any difference."

"Then there *was* something left," he insisted.

"I just told you."

"I'm talking about the satisfaction you got out of telling me off just then. Because if you can get a kick out of paying me back, then you still haven't reached the point where you don't care."

"Ken," she said unsteadily, "if you had *anything* else to do — a book to read, a movie to see, a game to play — you wouldn't be talking like this. You just bounced off Margot onto me."

He sat beside her. "No, you're wrong — all wrong. Vicky, I'm all shot inside. I didn't realize what a different person you'd made me until you went away —"

"I'll bet!" she said, rising away from him. Davy came in, self-consciously averting his face from them both. "Davy, after we eat, can we go for a ride?"

"If you want," he said without any expression.

"I *do* want," she replied, and went out to the kitchen.

As soon as possible, she and Davy started on their ride — with Davy still silent and thoughtful. He had no intention of stopping until they had come to some kind of understanding about Ken. He knew only too well that whatever she might say would only be what she wanted most to believe about herself, but he was driven to tie her with her own words — as if the statement "I love only you" carried with it some inescapable commitment that could never after be denied.

However, the silence between them as they rode was so much more binding than any words that the conversation never got started. He drove out to the bluffs; when he kissed her she trembled violently at his touch and soft surrender was implicit in her clinging lips.

As he rested beside her in the scented summer darkness, both of them breathless in the same rhythm, he could see that his life had abruptly widened into a world with such far horizons that his previous existence seemed cramped in retrospect. Up until now, he had been the untouched arranger of events outside himself—the unmoved poser of questions that were explosive only in the cold realm of knowledge; but now finally, he was himself being acted upon, great stirring winds were blowing within him. He held Vicky close because she was the one who had led him into this new world; and when she would be gone to be resting this way with Ken someday, he foresaw his collapse back into gray narrow loneliness. The vision was intolerable; and he tried to push it away by holding her face tightly to his.

As the days of their intimacy passed, he never noticed that he and Vicky actually had little to say to each other, so quickly did they fall into embrace and the same pattern of endearments. Her touch was all he wanted. Her hand in his, or her arms around his neck, seemed to convey an understanding that made words unnecessary. Those were the moments they discussed with complete frankness, for in the beginning of love, the sensation of love is the one thing that is truly shared. He knew only one reticence—he didn't dare ask her the question that was always in his mind: "Are you thinking of Ken?" He simply took it for granted that she had been.

During the day, he worked with only the top of his mind on the various projects that came to his hand. For the most part, he was engaged in long imaginary conversations with her, where he explained everything about himself with complete honesty. Yet at the moment they met, the explanation seemed dry and tedious because her eyes appeared to be saying that she already knew.

He had never in his life dreamed himself capable of looking at his work as only a dull daily interlude between evenings of all-absorbing love. That had always seemed a sign of weakness, the taint of the partial man; but now from the vantage point of experience, he could only shake his head at his previous naïveté. Even when, under his very eyes, the project seemed to turn towards catastrophe, he watched the increasing signs of disintegration with detached numbness, as if there were no real need to intervene.

He heard advice come from his lips, he saw himself taking action with all the outer signs of conviction; but across the cleavage that separated him from his inner self, he knew that most of his concern was

lolling on a hillside holding hands with love, while the busy man racing below was only a creature stumbling along on an impetus that was left over from the distant past.

5

Davy sat across from Brock at the desk in the bank, but the banker was facing Ken, listening to the impassioned words of self-justification. Ken's approach was all wrong, Davy thought with distant impatience. It was a mistake to play up all the difficulties involved in transmitting a picture of motion. Instead, he should be emphasizing the success of the still-image transmission; but ever since Ken had missed his own privately set deadline two weeks before, he seemed to have lost contact with the world about him.

The two of us, Davy thought ironically: the blind and the lame.

Inwardly, he shouted to himself to intervene before it was too late.

"— The main point," he said aloud at last. "The main point is that finally we were able to transmit *something* and prove the value of electron scanning."

"That's true enough." Brock played with a paperweight, and his agreement was slow and tentative. "What you fellows have to tell me is good news, but I don't mind adding it was a long time on the way — long and expensive. We didn't complain; but on the other hand, that doesn't mean we didn't think about it. Nobody's saying that the money was foolishly spent. And while it is true that you boys are living better, dressing better, driving better cars, I'm the first to admit that it's all come out of your own money —"

"It certainly has," Davy agreed quietly. The implied rebuke was beginning to rouse him, and his firmness made Brock glance up.

Ken burst in: "The fact is that you were one of the first to recognize that we're shooting for control of a possible billion-dollar industry —"

"The fact is," Brock said, mimicking Ken's phrase, "we're beginning to realize that the kind of money required is a lot more than any private individual or group of private individuals has a right to put up. Now I know that you boys had your heart set on riding this thing through all the way under your own control, as much for the satisfaction as for the money. And I admit that your backers agreed to go along with you. You can even accuse us of breaking faith with you,

and I won't bother to deny it. Too much money is involved, that's all; and the plain fact is that it's *our* money. You two had your turn directing policy, and now we're going to insist on ours. It seems to me — and I've discussed this with my fellow backers — this is the right time to get a major radio company interested. Sooner or later we'd have to sell out no matter what we promised you. The really big money has the setup, the know-how, the staff and, more than anything, the inducement. A billion dollars is an awfully nice thing to contemplate, but nobody ever got poor taking a twenty per cent profit. You boys can find something else to work on. Bright fellows like you must be full of ideas."

Davy kept his voice friendly. "Our immediate answer, if you want it, is a flat NO — unless you want to go into more detail. But we don't intend to give up our work on the project. It means too much to us."

"As it happens, we do have an alternative. This Vollrath project is getting wonderful publicity. Aviation radio is in the immediate future if it isn't already here. Why not develop that? If you boys should want to start manufacturing aviation radio sets, and put off what you're doing for your spare time like a hobby, your backers will listen very seriously. Something that's got a name. Why, we might even rediscuss salaries and bonuses out of profits — when they start being earned."

Davy rose abruptly.

"Ken and I will have to talk all this over between ourselves, Mr. Brock. It's too important a decision to make out of hand."

"Take your time, boys." He glanced at them coldly. "A few days, if you want."

"But suppose we develop an outfit that *can* transmit a moving image?" Ken insisted.

"Within the next few days?"

"It might take a few weeks," Ken conceded.

Brock shrugged. "Fine. That can only increase the value of the property."

"You mean you'll still want to sell us out?"

"Oh, that's definite. One other thing — I ought to warn you against running up any bills that may go beyond your present bank balance. I'm instructed to tell you that that's all there is, boys. As of this minute. Unless you want to go into the business of manufacturing airplane radios."

Davy touched Ken's arm as a signal to be quiet, and they left.

"Why the hell did you have to be so polite?" Ken was savage.

"Because there's nothing to be gained by sounding off."

"What are we supposed to do?"

"Sit tight."

"And if they don't give in?"

"We don't give in either."

"What about the work?"

"We go on working."

"And what about money?"

"We spend it."

"We don't have it to spend."

"Then we'll run up bills. When we don't have any credit, we lay off the staff. If we have to, we move out of the house, sell the cars — but we go on sitting tight."

He spoke calmly, almost absently. What they had to do was clear enough, but behind his voice he couldn't feel the urgency of the situation. Outside himself, panic began to swirl around the concrete walls of his detachment, and within his bastion he could feel the distant tremors, but nothing more. Nothing out there was truly real.

6

They had voted for siege and they got it. After that last meeting with Brock, no other word was exchanged. They had promised to let him know their decision, but they didn't call him; and Brock in his turn made no move to remind them. Nevertheless, Brock must have let his decision be known because the Mallory Laboratories found themselves suddenly without credit. They were penniless at the end of two weeks. There was nothing to do but to lay off the staff. The decision left Davy with a prowling uneasiness.

"Let's go up and talk to the old man," he said. "You and I have been batting this back and forth too much by ourselves. Maybe he'll have something to say."

"No," said Ken slowly. "I don't like to go up any more. Not when he's in the wrong mood."

"If he's in that kind of mood there'll be no use in talking to him about anything," Davy replied. "Let's take a chance."

They knew they were lucky even before Norton Wallis said a word.

The very way he turned his head when they entered showed his vigor and alertness.

"Come on in," he said. "What's the matter? The way you boys walk, you sound as if you were dragging dead bodies."

"We're in a jam," Davy said, taking the stool very close to the workbench. He explained the situation that had led up to the layoff.

"Do you think we're being hasty?" Ken asked. "Maybe we could hold out a little longer by giving them shares."

"How can we take the chance?" Davy demanded. "We'd be giving them stock out of our own shares. As it is, we hold voting control by only one share. What would happen if one of the men got a good offer from Brock? Could you blame a man for selling if he got really hard up?"

"What good is the damn voting control? About all we can do with it is to keep Brock from doing what he wants. If we could only get rid of him!"

"How can you?" Wallis asked. "From what you tell me, Brock has kept his part of the bargain."

"Well, so have we!"

"What of it? Even with all of you living up to your promises, you still don't have a system for commercial use. It's tough, but it's nobody's fault. As a matter of fact, Brock's proposition that you go into aviation radio is a fair one."

"You mean we ought to take it?" Davy demanded.

"Do *you* want to?" Wallis asked.

"Hell no, but you say it's the fair thing —"

"I don't give a damn whether it's fair or not. We're talking about what you *want* to do. Brock did almost everything he promised; his offer was a fair one, and I can still say to hell with it! I agree with Davy. That — down there — is what you want to be doing and you shouldn't care how much it costs or who pays the price. But don't be sore at Brock. He threatened to sell you out? What of it? From his point of view, you're the unreasonable ones, and my position is — So what?"

"All I know is Brock's in our way, and I don't like him," Ken said. "There must be a way to shake him out."

"If you want to shake out Brock just to get even, forget it," Wallis said. "If it's because he stands in the way of the work, that's different."

"You two and your distinctions," said Ken. "What's the difference one way or another?" He stood at the window, white-faced and tor-

mented. Behind him was the silence of the shop. Ken was all alone in a world where no one else could ever enter and Davy didn't try to call him back.

"There must be a way to shake him out," Ken murmured again and again. His face grew graver, and when finally he turned, he looked ill and drawn.

"It's up to me, I guess," he said. "I'll go see him myself."

"Brock?" Davy asked.

A moment passed before Ken answered. He jangled his car keys in his open palm; and the muscles of his jaw flickered with tension.

"Not Brock," he said bitterly. "For all your wise talk, you're so love-sick, you're no good to anybody. And as for Margot, she walked out on us too long ago for anybody to remember that far back. To hell with her and to hell with you! It's up to me — just as it's always been up to me. I'm going to see Vollrath. I'll meet you later at the house!"

"Vollrath!" said Davy, startled. He rose and crossed to his brother. "What for?"

"To make a deal."

"With what?"

"I don't know!"

"But what will you say?"

"I don't know!"

"Then why are you going?"

"To shake Brock, that's why! I don't care what I have to promise, or how I have to beg; nobody is going to take our work away until we're ready to let go. So don't try to stop me, Davy, and for God's sake don't come with me," he shouted. "This is one man I've got to see by myself!"

He turned in his violence and slammed out the door without even bothering to close it after him. Davy watched him stride down the hill, but he never glanced back.

"Poor bastard!" Wallis said. Davy turned to find him peering at the empty doorway. "He doesn't know what's driving him."

"What's driving us both?" Davy demanded in despair. "Will you tell me? We do things as if there were a kind of murder in our hearts. Why? We both feel inside us that there's something we've got to do, to make, to prove. Whoever stands in our way, we hate. Whoever helps us, we love. What is it inside us?"

"Suppose you were starving and the food was snatched away. Or there was a woman you were crazy for, and someone locked the door to her room. Wouldn't there be murder in your heart?"

"This is different!"

"It's not. Every time I pick up a newspaper, I ask 'What the hell is the matter with this country?' But I don't have to ask that question. I *know* what's the matter."

"I don't care about the country. I'm talking about Ken and me."

"And so am I! All my life, I've been watching something get lost. Ever since my first job. Did you know that when I was fifteen, I was working on the *Monitor*? That's how long ago I'm talking about. In those days, if you worked hard enough and long enough, you could find what you wanted in this country. It made life easy and full of hope. Yet day-to-day living was hard. Today, living is almost a joke, it's so easy. Whatever you want to do, there's a machine to do it for you. Yet life is harder today because something has gone, something important."

"Get to me," Davy pleaded. "For God's sake, what's eating me?"

"The thing that's gone. Do you know what it is? It's this!" The old man held up his two hands outstretched. "Working with these: that's what's gone! I don't mean man-killing labor. Those days are gone, and thank God for it. I mean making things the way your hands *want* to make them. Men need that like they need to breathe. It's an instinct that's being smothered — an instinct for workmanship — the need to do your work in your own way. That's what's gone. Even the name has gone so that when people feel it, they don't know what it is. They just feel as if they were being suffocated — so they squirm and lash out in panic. That's what's eating you."

"But that doesn't explain why everything boils down to talk, fight, curse, scheme about money. That's all Ken and I seem to be doing ever since we got started. I hate it!" he said bitterly. "That's not my work."

"But it is," the old man insisted. "Money is the language. It started when I was a kid right after the war. Money talk wherever you turned. That was supposed to be your mission in life. Anything else was sinful. This country tells itself that it has invented everything that's any good. We've invented only one thing: mass production. But if there's one place where there's no room for any one man's special workmanship, that's the belt line."

"Then there you are!" said Davy, turning away. "It doesn't apply to us. We work as far from any belt line as anyone could get."

"No, you don't. You two are engineers in the country where the belt line operates, and everybody shakes with the vibration. Maybe if you were a couple of college scientists, you wouldn't feel it so much; but

then you wouldn't really be living in the America that's the rich America. You're *not* scientists the way those fellows are. They're different from you and me. They have an itch to understand something that was never understood before. The engineer wants to *build* something useful that was never built before. That's the difference. You and I aren't satisfied with just knowing, nor would the other fellows be satisfied with just building."

"There's not that much difference between the engineer and the pure scientist," Davy said slowly. "We both belong to a certain tradition. We both feel that our work changes the world for people."

"Hell, I didn't say that an engineer was less than a scientist. All I mean is that the small difference that makes you either one of them or one of us also makes the big difference between the kinds of world you live in. If you invent something useful, it's going to belong to the belt line; and the belt line is business. So even if it's workmanship that makes your heart pump, business is the air an inventor has to breathe and the language he's got to learn to talk. Bear it in mind, boy; it's the story of your life, just as it's been the story of mine."

Chapter Eight

Ken drove all alone through the blue windy twilight. On the other side of the flat town lay the Vollrath plant. There the sky was already a sooty gray streaked with red. Swirls of dead leaves danced wildly down the streets, and his tires gasped while racing over them. He was beset with hurry, as if he were already late for an appointment; while for all he knew Vollrath wouldn't even be there.

When a man has fought valiantly, his approach to the place of his surrender is a slow downward passage through hopelessness until, one by one, his flags drag behind him. Yet even after that he will still cling to the hope that someday the right will triumph in the hands of other leaders of other hosts in battles yet to be fought. Then that too begins to fade. At the end of his lonely ride, all he asks is that he be not asked to bend his own knee too deeply, and so at the very last minute, the

vanquished leader makes his final bargain with fate — "If only my conqueror leaves me my pride, then I will love him. And if I, of all people, can love him, then my defeat was right and proper, and I live in a just world."

Yet what battle had been fought, or even what Ken was surrendering, he couldn't say. In his heart was a heavy sadness that would have been suffocating had it not been for the bitterness of his hatred for Brock. What he hated in Brock was not so much the threat of betrayal, but the man's implacability, to Ken an inhuman trait. At least Vollrath was a man of passion, impulse and pride. Ken even began to admit a grudging admiration for him.

By the time Ken reached the plant, the building was a block of darkness between the darker slabs of earth and sky. His Chrysler swung up against the surrounding wire gate and the headlights stared at the emptiness on the other side. Then a night watchman appeared at the gate just as Ken started to turn the car about to leave. The swinging forefingers of his headlights touched a faint gleam to Vollrath's Cunningham parked all alone by the building wall.

"Mr. Vollrath inside?" Ken asked the watchman.

The man nodded. "Hasn't come out yet. Who do I say wants to see him?"

Without getting out of his car, Ken gave his name; and the man on the other side of the gate walked into the darkness behind him. Ken was left all alone on the infinite plateau. The dusk sky was now very low, as if it were the underside of some cosmic millstone that spread from deep night in the east to the thin crimson rim of sunset in the west. In another moment, the great pressing stone came down and the night was complete. Yet lights still flickered and moved; the wind still blew. The world would go on always seeming to end, and catastrophe was only the clasp of toothless jaws through which life could pass and keep on going forever.

On the sudden surge of returned hope, Ken wanted to spin the car around in flight from the surrender which all at once seemed unnecessary. Then another impulse drove him to leave his fate to chance.

If he agrees to see me, then everything will turn out all right, he thought. His returning arrogance increased his demand still more: Vollrath would have to come to the gate himself as if he were the supplicant, not Ken.

A moment later, a door of light opened in the straight-lined mass of the dark building, and he saw silhouetted there two men coming out.

The two sets of footsteps were in dissonance — one walked on shorter legs than the other. He heard them talking and he recognized Vollrath's laugh. The pounding of his heart deepened. Then the two men separated. The other car door slammed and its four headlights became brilliant eyes staring at their own reflection in the brick wall. A moment had to pass before Ken felt the full weight of the outrage, and then the watchman was unlocking the gate. The sport car backed up and swung around so that it looked like a wide-eyed bat with illuminated wing tips, and the bat flew slowly just above the ground through the open gate, where once again it became an automobile that had stopped just across the path of the Chrysler.

"That you, Mallory?" Doug's voice was raised against the wind gusts. "I understand you want to talk to me."

Ken's hands pressed hard on the steering wheel. Then very deliberately, as if he had to move or suffocate, he pulled himself out of his car and walked across to where Vollrath sat waiting behind an engine that growled with patience and power.

"I did want to see you, Vollrath, but not if you're in a rush."

"I've got a few minutes. What is it?"

Ken shook his head slowly. There was murder in his heart and tears were behind his eyes, and so he handled himself as if he were fragile.

"Not out here," he said. "Go back inside. Otherwise, forget it."

Vollrath stared up at him for a cool instant of judgment. Weeks had passed since they had seen each other on the test flight — weeks in which Vollrath had traveled thousands of miles through countless lives, ambitions, had seen his name written in huge letters and heard it in shouts from strangers — but he and Ken were still in the moment when they were both leaving the plane on a sweltering afternoon of fury.

"OK," Vollrath said quietly. "Get in and I'll back her up."

Ken walked around and sat beside him, refusing to allow his body to relax in the silken leather. Vollrath went backwards through the darkness to the watchman. He nodded towards Ken's Chrysler as if it were a thing that had no name.

"Drive that back into the yard. We're going inside."

The big car whirled smoothly backwards and Ken felt the sickening helplessness of a suicide who has changed his mind a fraction of an instant too late. He had come to the place of surrender, but the opposing general seated there didn't even know about the war for there wasn't any war. But it was too late for Ken to turn back. The flags had trailed

too long in the dust, and even now they would be handed over submissively to the surprised and contemptuous stranger.

2

On his return from the plant, Ken left his car in the driveway and made his way to the front door, leaning against the wind which stung him with dry leaves that seemed to jump out of nowhere. He was so stunned and tired that he felt thin to himself, as if his clothing, like his ambitions, had been originally tailored for a man twice his size.

The wind was rising all the time. His breath was snatched away from him, tears were ripped from his eyes, then his hat lifted ludicrously from his head so that he had to whirl and hold himself together as if he were the butt of the whole world. He stumbled up the two brick steps, ruffled, wind-messed and so bruised in his heart that he wanted only to find a place where he could crumple up and hide his face in his hands. Either that or to kill someone.

When he slammed the door behind him, resting against it to catch his breath, he opened his eyes to see that the storm was still with him, for although he had left the biting flood of air outside, he was suddenly held in the still grip of Margot's angry gaze. Looking from her to Davy, Ken saw that they had been arguing just up to the moment of his entrance, and now they had both turned to him. His face was deathly white and his eyes were bruised with shame and rage. He glanced at both of them in a silent admonition not to speak to him on pain of death; then walked to the shallow hall closet where he carefully hung away his hat and coat.

"Do we eat?" he demanded over his shoulder.

"Do we talk?" his sister said in exactly his tone, so that he turned slowly, pointing a finger straight at her.

"Just this," he said. "If you have one drop of loyalty left, you'll quit Vollrath tomorrow!" The first words made other words easier, and he looked past her to Davy, saying bitterly, "He's even worse than Brock. At least Brock earned his own money, but this smug fat cat — You should have heard him. In his experience . . . he says. What did *he* ever do? I almost laughed in his face, but he's got these delusions of grandeur. You'd think he was the director of ten corporations . . ."

"He is," said Margot. "And who are you to make fun of him? *You* almost laughed in his face! Don't make *me* laugh."

He turned to face her lashing contempt in the same way he had leaned against the wind outside. He looked at her, wanting to hate her, thinking that he hated her, wondering at his own stupidity for ever having set her up as the unattainable perfection of all that a woman should be. In his mind he tore her to pieces: the voice he had always loved rang in his ears as common and shrill; the figure he had always admired was too thin. As she spoke he watched her in the deceptive silence that was not attention at all, but deliberate, imagined murder of an ideal. Thank God, he was free of her at last! He had heard nothing that she said, and when she finished, he waited for his mind to recall some shred that he could hurl back at her.

"What right did you have?" She must have said that at one point. "Who gave you permission to speak to him?"

"Permission?" he said, fighting merely to be heard. He could scarcely breathe. "Since when do *I* need permission from anybody?"

"When anybody in this family goes to Doug for money, *my* permission is needed because I'm the door you're walking through. You damned fool! Because you went to see him the way you did, you've probably spoiled everything I've tried so hard to build up for *us* — For *us*? For *you* — you idiot!"

"Margot!" Davy's voice came warningly over her shoulder, and Ken saw his brother rise behind her, but she didn't for an instant relax her bitter contempt of Ken.

"So he turned you down!" she said. "Well, I'm glad. You deserved it!" She saw that she had slapped him, and with fiery satisfaction she threw the words at him again.

"You mean that!" he said slowly, wondering how she could still make him ache even after he had thrown her out of his heart. "It doesn't count that I was willing to go to *him*, of all people! He didn't even know what it was costing me."

"What didn't he know? Swallow what pride? What did he ever take that belonged to you?"

"Margot, shut *up*!" Ken heard Davy's shout above the gasp that came from his own sick heart.

"Look at Mr. High and Mighty over there," she said, still ignoring Davy. "Nobody can resist him! Everybody belongs to him and he just takes and gives at his own sweet pleasure! There's only one reason you hate him — because I love him. That and nothing else!"

Davy had already reached her. He seized her arm and whirled her about.

"Why do you have to hurt him?" Davy demanded. "What pleasure do you get from it?"

"She's not hurting me," Ken said, but he spoke with woodenness. "Leave her alone."

"Don't lie to me, she's killing you!" Davy shook Margot, holding her face close to his as he spoke. "We don't care if Vollrath turned us down. We never needed him. We don't need him now, and we never will!"

"He's the one man you *do* need," she retorted. "I must have known it from the very beginning. I couldn't take my eyes off him as if he's the one I'd been waiting for all the time. But I *know* him, and nobody else does. You can't ask him for a favor. It's even dangerous to take a present from him. He's got to feel he's forcing things on you. All you wanted was money," she said, escaping Davy's grasp to turn on Ken again, for he was the one she had always loved the most and always would. "Well, maybe that's all I wanted at first, but now you've spoiled it because he'll think you went with my permission. Never once," she said slowly, "did I ask anything for myself from him."

"There's that *permission* again," Ken said. "Who do you think *you* own?"

"You," she said right into Ken's face. "I own you just the way you own me. Yes, let's say it out loud. You idiot, do you think I'm crying for myself? No, baby, nobody hurts me! But I know that you can't stand being laughed at . . ."

"He didn't laugh —"

"He laughed," she insisted. "Ken, Ken, why didn't you come to me? Can't you talk to me any more?"

He shook his head, because all the hatred, the murder, had left him and his heart felt like an empty bag.

"No," he said. "Not any more. We used to be friends but not any more."

"But we are," she insisted. She put her arms about him, pressing his head down against her hair. The familiar scent enveloped him in his oldest, longest love, for the woman he had torn to pieces had only been a distorted image of her. "Baby, baby," she whispered. "It's still the same, only we're grown up now. It's not that we've lost anything for each other; it's just that we've added other things for other people."

"The hell we have!" he said. "At least, it's not that way for me."

"Well, it is that way for me," she said sadly. She raised her face and kissed him on the mouth for the first time in so many years that he felt as if he were a boy kissing a girl for the first time. He held her to

him tightly, for he was suddenly deluged now with the reminder that no other girl's lips had ever seemed quite as sweet as hers, no other arms could hold him with the same tenderness. After so many years of broken loves and unfinished flirtations, he knew that the warmest of them had been only pale reminders of this embrace. Through all his anger, the relief of home-coming was so achingly sweet that sobs shivered in his chest.

"You're not going back to him any more, are you?" he begged.

"Of course I am." She held him away, looking up with surprise. "Ah, I thought everything was going to be all right now."

"Don't ask me," he pleaded, turning away. "Christ, just don't ask me!"

She was very gentle. "Then I'll just *tell* you, Ken — that's the way it's going to be because that's the way *I* want it to be."

She patted his arm and then went into the kitchen. After a moment, he glanced up to see Davy looking at him with infinite sadness and pity; and yet there was a withdrawn quality in Davy's deep eyes that told Ken that Davy would rather have died than bear the burden of this new and inescapable insight.

3

Sometime during the night, the wind had spilled heavy rains, and then died. The morning was cold and ice lay in smooth steel sheets beneath the lowering sky. Doug Vollrath arrived at the plant gates at his usual hour, but his promptness this morning had called for an exertion of sheer will because he hated the place more than at any time since his return from the Eastern triumph. The low buildings of the plant appeared so shabby, so trivial, so unworthy of him, that he wondered with disbelief at the original magic of his first infatuation. To be seen here now by any of his old friends would have made him actually ashamed.

Fairly early in his life he had come secretly to confess to himself that he was a man of quick enthusiasms, but he had made a virtue of that aimless desperation by thinking of himself as a man of action. His main trouble, he told himself as he drove through the gates, was that he still hadn't learned the exact moment to let a project drop. What difference did it make whether or not he closed the plant forever? For whose benefit was he pretending that he still cared what went on here? The

stock issue was already on the market. A fair price would have been a dollar a share, but people were bidding thirty dollars in anticipation of all the profits he was going to bring to the company. To hell with the stockholders! Why should he bore himself to death for them? Why shouldn't he just pick up and go?

He stepped out of his car onto the ice-covered parking strip and looked with frank aversion at the empty cars of his staff — even their license plates seemed foreign, and he yearned for the black and yellow of New York. Winter might be all around him here; but Fifth Avenue, in his imagination, was still as he had last seen it — late afternoon on a sunny September day. Above the heads of the bright crowds, the very air seemed to sparkle with a mysterious excitement. There was the sense that one was caught in the upsurge that would explode within the next few minutes into a crescendo of gayety and pleasure. All he had to do was to keep walking at this brisk pace through the crispness about him and there it would be waiting for him — the gift of happiness without consequences.

Either that or — his fancy swung the width of the continent — to be driving down the hills above the Hollywood lights so far below that all the garish cheapness was scorched away by the million pin points of brilliance, where one tiny cluster of glitter was the party which fifty million dream-bemused people would have longed to attend; and there he was, pretending deliciously to himself that he was not at all excited, that he was racing towards it at breakneck speed only because he liked to drive fast.

He huddled into himself from the still penetration of the Wickersham cold, and walked quickly up the two wooden steps of the plant offices, nodded to two machinists, despising their stupidity for believing his pretense that they were all equals on the job. In his own office, he wondered still again at the incredible fact that once he could have thought that to come out here on the spur of the moment would seem the height of dash and integrity.

In that moment of self-contempt, he saw himself as a lunatic actor racing from theater to theater, thrusting his way through the startled players to shout a few words into the face-filled darkness beyond the footlights in the vain hope that somewhere he would be in character — that somewhere an audience would burst into applause — and for that brief heart-swelling moment at the height of unreality he would finally feel real.

Margot swung into the office as if she had left it only a moment be-

fore his arrival, and was now returning to see whether he had finally come in.

"Well," he said sharply, "what's the morning mail?"

"Two more orders, and an inquiry from a Texas syndicate for a long-range plane to fly from Houston to Nome. They think it's time to stop measuring America from coast to coast because it leaves out Texas. It says so right here in black and white."

"Oh, my God," he sighed. "Tell Mel I want to see him. Wait, before you go, Margot, tell me — what's the matter with your brother? Besides needing money."

She turned very slowly. "My brother does not need money."

"*He* thinks he does. You know he was here last night."

"Of course, I know. I asked him to come. As a favor to me."

"*You* asked him?"

"I asked him."

He looked at her steadily. "Then why didn't you ask me yourself?"

"Because it was purely a business proposition. There was this chance for you to get in on the ground floor of something that's going to be terribly big. So big that there's no one else who's big enough to handle it. I thought you'd want that chance."

"That's not the way *he* put it."

"But that's what it comes to."

"Listen, that was a desperate boy who came to see me. Don't you think I can *smell* an empty pocket by this time?"

"I don't care what you can smell."

"Margot, you're lying," he said. "That boy never even spoke to you about coming to me. It was his own idea."

"And I say it was mine."

He laughed with vexation. "Damn it — well, I'm not going into it."

"Then don't."

"Are you sore?"

"Of course not."

"Of course not!" he said mimicking her. "Like hell you're not! Say, what is it about your family that makes you stick together so that if one of you thinks he's lost face, all the others are ready to go to war? Who do you think you are — the Capulets? Or the Medicis?"

"I'll get Mel," she said, going towards the door.

"To hell with Mel," he said crossing in front of her to block her way. "Sit down, Margot, I want to talk to you. Do you know how long it's been since we were together last?"

"I haven't counted the time."

"Oh, yes, you have! Same as I. You keep remembering the last time and all the other times before — the same as I. And tell me, in all that time what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I can't say the same. You're a little crazy with this cockeyed pride of yours. You'd rather die than ask me for anything, but just the same your brother barges in and asks for a handout. So what have you been proving?"

"I changed my mind about Ken," she said. "He didn't come because I asked him."

"No?"

"No. He didn't come at all."

"And I was dreaming?"

"You were dreaming. How about it, Doug?" she demanded. "Was Ken here?"

"No, I guess not."

"Don't laugh like that! It's not funny. Did I or anybody in my family ever ask you for money — or even a favor?"

"No," he said. "Nobody. Ever."

"You're damned right. Nobody. Do you still want Mel?"

"To hell with Mel. I want you," he said and then suddenly burst into the laughter he had been trying to contain all along. "Ah, I'm sorry, baby, sit down. I'm not laughing at *you* — I'm —" Her furious eyes filled with tears, but then the absurdity overwhelmed her at the same moment, and she too collapsed into hilarity.

He put his arms about her shoulders and then they hugged fondly — without passion — for the intimate understanding of that moment was pure comradeship. He had lied to her — or he thought he had been lying — when he said that no other woman had excited him as much as she had. The first flush of insatiable desire, when from moment to moment he could think of nothing but her, had long since passed. During the past few months there had been long stretches when he had forgotten about her completely, even when she was in his presence. But now that he was touching her again, now that his hands stroked her back with the particular light caress he knew she loved, he had the sense of returning to a haven whose warmth he had temporarily forgotten.

"Now isn't this nice?" he asked.

"It's wonderful," she sighed.

"And aren't you the fool to throw it away?"

"And aren't you the fool not to want it?"

"Who says I don't want it?"

"Do we have to start *that* all over again?"

"Let's start everything all over again," he said. "Let's get away from here. I never want to see the place again. Listen, you've never been to California. Let's go — tonight. We'll get in the car and just drive west. I'll show you everything and take you to the craziest parties you ever dreamed about. We'll go just this way and buy things as we want them. We'll be brand new people every five hundred miles. Come on, baby, come on; I'm dying here!"

"And what about the plant?"

"Who cares! I bought it for Mel. It's time he took over. All I want from here is you — you and Carl."

"Carl? Bannerman?"

"That man's a genius for sensing public taste. At least he's something I can get started with. I don't know — pictures, politics — All I want right now," he said with deep intensity, "is to get going. What do you say?"

"How am I going? As what?"

"As anything you want — nurse, secretary, reading companion, countess in disguise. Say it and I'll buy the costume!"

He was so boyish in his enthusiasm that she had to smile. She had never seen him so young, so guilelessly exuberant. A moment had to pass before she realized that he was kicking off the past eighteen months of his life as if all that time, the effort, the frustration of the men who had worked with him, were simply sopping wet garments that the skin could no longer stand; that this wild enthusiasm for Bannerman now was what he must have felt once for Mel Thorne, that his offer to her, apparently so limitless, also had its bounds. For if she were to allow herself to blurt out, "Let me go as your wife," all the joy in his face would die, smothered by the descending curtain of reserve and calculation. But one thing she knew very clearly — he was finished here. He would never come back, and after a while the Vollrath Aviation Company would be an empty shell.

"I'll go with you," she said at last. "And I'll go in my usual capacity."

"But you never took a trip with me before."

"I've been your secretary for quite a while."

He laughed. "Not this time, baby."

"But that's the only way it's going to be."

"And that crazy condition?"

"It still goes."

"I'll take my chances!" he said, but some of the soaring life had gone out of his spirits; and he swore to himself that if she tried to cross him once more, he'd leave her on the spot. He decided that he'd drop her anyhow when he got out there. Right now he was wild to have someone to be with him, someone to play with — not to fear. He sensed that Margot had reached deep into some borderline of his life and if he permitted her to pass across that crucial line, he would never again be the same. He didn't quite know what he would be; but Vollrath mistrusted strangers — even those that lurked within himself.

4

When the Mallorys had moved into the new cottage on Chester Avenue, they were too busy to make a ceremony of their arrival at the fulfillment of an old, old dream. Every so often, each of them, in their separate privacies, would think back to the early longing for a place of their own, and wonder why the attainment of what lonely children had once considered the first step to complete happiness could have turned out to mean so little. Davy told himself that it was only that so many other things happened to be going on at the same time. Sooner or later they would all sit down together and enjoy it.

The opportunity, though, had never come; and Davy finally realized that it never would — on the night that Margot came in, her eyes sparkling, to announce that she was there only to take a few things in a bag for California.

"You mean Vollrath is waiting outside for you?" Ken asked. He was pale.

"Yes. We'll be starting as soon as I'm ready."

"How long will you be gone?"

She shrugged. "I don't know."

"But you *will* be coming back, won't you?" he insisted.

"Well, of course," she replied, but only then did her eyes become startled as if she too had just begun to realize what was happening. Davy could see that she was frightened — as frightened as he was himself at the premonition that her departure was only a half-sensed portent whose deeper, tragic meaning was still to unfold. "I'll be back in — in just a few weeks, that's all," she added hurriedly. "All my expenses are

being paid so that I'll be able to send you fifty dollars every week."

"Thanks," said Ken with dry sarcasm. "It'll come in handy."

She glanced at him with a hurt look, and then hurried up the stairs. They listened to her footsteps overhead, but in another moment she came clattering down with a tiny suitcase so lightly packed that it swung like a purse. She went to Davy first, and they embraced tightly.

"By, kid." His voice was husky. "Have a good time."

"I'll be back," she promised fervently. "You *know* I will."

She turned to Ken, who was still standing by his chair.

"Don't you have a kiss for me?" she asked.

His face turned still whiter. He had been thinking of the kiss on the night before, and now she was telling him that she had forgotten all about it.

"Brothers and sisters don't kiss," he said. "Not when they're all grown up. They just shake hands." But he didn't extend his hand.

"Ken!"

"And don't forget to write. And, of course, that dough."

She didn't answer, but she went silently to the door, walking as if the suitcase were too heavy for her. She paused there for a moment, looking back at both of them with the hopelessness of trying to explain what was inexcusable but only too human. Then she swung quickly out into the dark. After a few seconds, Davy and Ken knew that the silent car had raced away. Ken took a long deep breath.

"Well, to hell with that!" he said. "Let's get it over. When do we move out of here?"

"Move?"

"What's the point of staying? She's never coming back. She doesn't mean what she says and she never meant anything she said. She has even forgotten the way — long before we ever thought of running away from the farm — she was always promising us a place of our own someday, a house with rooms, with real furniture — 'Even with curtains,' she used to say. Remember how she used to talk about it?"

"I remember."

"And even when you and I started talking about other things — bigger things — she always kept on dreaming about the house and I believed her. To me, it got to have a special meaning — like a landmark to watch out for when you're going someplace new. We'd travel along that magic road until we came to the house, shining, big and beautiful — and right around the next bend of that dream road would be all the other things we wanted, like open treasure chests waiting just for us to

come along. Well, Davy, we made the wrong turning somewhere because this can't be the house we all used to be talking about; and that wonderful bend in the road doesn't seem to be coming up either. So, let's get back to the barn where we belong. And we don't move out of that barn again for anything less than a French château."

"Or to the poorhouse," Davy said.

"Or to the poorhouse! Come on, let's go."

In the shop, Davy dumped his belongings on a table that was already piled high with papers, but his glance sought the tiered array of apparatus just as it always did when he entered; for there stood his one true possession, his one treasure, his very being. The racks of trays stood six feet high, and the surface of each tray was completely covered with arrangements of radio tubes, transformers, coils, condensers and resistors. There was nothing that he hadn't once touched or decided upon.

He put his hand on the rounded glass chamber that was the camera tube and let his fingers stroke the smoothness.

Through the glass shell, he saw the cluster of metal rings and mesh that had been machined and spaced with such exquisite — and now fruitless — care. He loved the tube, its touch, its sight, and he remembered all their hopes for it. As recently as just a few days ago, when the cross had been successfully transmitted, the camera tube had still seemed perfection. But now that the fault had been traced, no amount of sentimental memory could save it from condemnation. As Davy withdrew his hand, the intricate little island universe was nothing more than trash to be discarded in the morning.

"Ken," he said slowly. "As long as we're coming back to where we started, let's go all the way and start at the beginning here too."

He walked away, but, when he looked up a few minutes later, he saw that Ken was standing where he himself had stood. Now Ken's hand was resting on the tube.

"Let's get ourselves organized," Davy said. "What are you doing?"

"Thinking," said Ken sadly. "Just thinking."

Davy hesitated, and then went on arranging their gear. He didn't call Ken again. Ken had had enough failures in the past few days.

To Davy it seemed that he and Ken were engaged in a retreat that threatened to be endless, for, the very next morning, Charlie Stewart called on the telephone.

"You boys better hop right down here," the lawyer said. "There's bad news. Your patent application has been rejected."

"Rejected?" Davy said stupidly. "How can that be?"

"That's what you tell me. You know that I don't understand this technical stuff, but it looks to my untutored eyes as though you two pioneers aren't pioneers at all. You and Ken better read what the Patent Office has to say."

As the car sped rumbling down the cobbled avenue, Ken's face was pinched from much more than the spear points of wind that cut through the roadster's draughty side curtains. Every so often, he would burst out with "If they think —!" but the vague threats were abortive and Davy knew that Ken's fury was merely frightened bewilderment.

But Davy was aware of Ken only distantly. Not until now had he realized how all along he had been inwardly sustained by the secret assurance that he possessed the marvelous power of creativeness, and so he had never cared too deeply when some man trod on his outer pride or a girl had tried to break his heart. Norton Wallis had been right with his talk about an instinct for creation.

Ken's bitterness, though, was savage.

"And we were going to be the big-money boys! By this evening it'll be all over town — in every garage, barbershop, grocery store — even in the men's room at the Faculty Club up on the Hill. Can you imagine how people will laugh at us?"

"People?" Davy said slowly. "Who gives a damn what anyone *says*? What counts is our idea — if it's really no good or not even original, then where do we stand? I always felt that I was carrying some kind of diamond locked in my heart; no matter what anyone did or said, that magical diamond went on sparkling off ideas and made me different from everyone else in the world. Now I'm wondering whether we have what we always thought we had, or are we only two ignorant kids forever dreaming up crackpot ideas like tilting the world?"

Ken glanced at him nervously. "I never thought of doubting that, Davy. We *must* be good. Listen," he cried, with frightened helplessness, "don't we *ever* worry about the same thing?"

J

If Charlie Stewart had been more experienced in Patent Office procedure, he would not have painted such a black picture. When Davy read the official communication, he saw that the rejection was not final. The official objections were that the Mallory application did not describe a completely original device because many of its com-

ponent features had already been covered singly by a number of existing patents which were listed thereinbelow. However, the Mallorys had six months' grace in which to answer the examiner's arguments point by point and so establish the originality they claimed for their invention.

Even though their legal position was far from hopeless, technologically they were in a bad way because all the cited patents demonstrated conclusively that other laboratories besides their own were working along exactly similar lines. It was necessary to borrow from the University Law Library some current issues of the *Gazette*. For days, Ken and Davy picked their way through the legal verbiage for the engineering information buried beneath. Immediately after breakfast every day, they rode down to Stewart's office and sat before the big books tense and watchful because every word was a potential trap. Until they had gone through every phrase of each of the cited patents, they could not know whether or not they had a position to defend.

During those days Davy hadn't even thought of Vicky. She finally reached him by telephone one morning just as he was about to leave the barn, and her voice was anxious.

"We've been working in Stewart's office," he said. "And from now on, don't bother calling the house—we don't live there any more. We've moved back here to the barn." Her silence, he knew, was shock, but he was too exhausted to explain. "I'll tell you all about it when I see you tomorrow."

"Will you be working tonight?"

"Yes. I'll be at Stewart's."

"Then can I stop by around ten o'clock with sandwiches and coffee? I promise not to bother you."

When she came up the wooden office stairs, the echoing nighttime silence of the business district made her footsteps sound louder than reality; and when she came into the office the naked light overhead seemed glaring. He was alone behind a table piled high with his notes and charts.

"Is it all right if I come in?" she asked. She carried two large paper bags.

"Sure," he said wearily. He smiled a little and leaned forward from his cramped position. "Stewart went at six, and Ken left only a little while ago. I've just been hanging around, wondering if I had really found a way out of this mess or whether hunger has made me light-minded. What did you bring?"

She took out a Thermos of coffee and the paper-wrapped sandwiches. "When did you eat last?" she asked as she watched him.

"Lunchtime, I guess. Eleven hours ago. No wonder I'm starving." His dark-blue eyes were ringed with exhaustion. "It's nice to see you."

"You still haven't told me what happened."

He shrugged as if the effort to talk was too much.

"Two weeks ago, Brock gave us our choice — either we sell out or quit. There's to be no more money coming through."

"This was two weeks ago? You never said a word!"

"I didn't think he'd go through with it, and besides, you and I had other things to talk about."

"Oh, Davy — ! You make me feel like such a fool!"

"Because I didn't tell you? I meant to," he said slowly. "I always had a million things ready to say, but the minute we were together, the minute I would touch you — there weren't any words any more. The whole world might have been coming apart around me and it still would have been the same way."

She was silent, but her face was troubled — even guilty.

"You knew about Margot," he said.

"I knew that she went away. That's not the trouble, is it?"

"No," he admitted. "That was something I had been expecting. Ken hadn't though. He's walking around now as if he'd been hit over the head. He's no more use to me now than I was to him."

"Because of me?"

"Is it your fault that I love you?" he asked with gentle irony. "No, not because of you. A few days ago we heard that our patent application had been turned down, at least for the time being. Look at the date of the decision — ten days ago. Where were *we* ten days ago? Were we dancing? Or out on the bluffs? Wherever we were, some man in Washington was looking at this paper and shaking his head, *No*."

"You do **blame** me," she said slowly. "In your heart you're saying 'If it weren't for her.'"

"Don't be foolish," he replied. "What was there to do?"

"That's what you say. But it's not what you feel. You and I have hardly spoken to each other. There's really nothing between us except the fact that you can excite me in a way I never thought possible." She shook her head helplessly. "If I had heard of some other girl doing the things I do, or saying the things I say to you — I don't know what I would have thought about her."

"But that's just what I love in you," he said quickly.

"You don't mean *love*," she said with sad knowledge. "You mean that's what excited you —"

"I meant *love*."

She shook her head. "We haven't even begun to fall in love, really. We were just wild about each other, but that part's over now. And you know it too. You knew it when I walked in."

"Well, my God, Vicky, after what I've been through —"

"Davy, that's not what I meant. The big explosion is over and the echoes are dying away. Either we let them die altogether or we're ready to fall in love. I think I love you, Davy," she said simply. "It's a different feeling from before." She looked at him searchingly for a moment and then said, "But you don't feel that way."

"But I do, Vicky —"

"No," she said gently. "You're just saying it because you don't want me to feel hurt, but in the long run that won't work. It's childish."

"Vicky," he said desperately. "I don't know what to say to you —"

"Then don't say anything."

He turned away. "I *can't* say it. I'd feel like a fool. I'd feel cheap." She was silent, waiting.

"It's Ken." His voice was very low and he couldn't look at her. "Ever since you came back, I've been waiting for you two to start again. The nights I don't see you and he's out too, it's all I can do to keep from driving around — positive that I'll come across the two of you together someplace. A million times, I've wanted to talk to you — about the work, about everything — but I always knew that once I did, I'd be lost. Because talking like this to you seems a closer intimacy to me than anything we've done together up until now! And there you've got it!"

"Davy! If I say something, will you believe me?"

"I can't believe there's nothing left," he said doggedly. "You may not think you're the same girl who loved him, but I damn well know you are. I was there, Vicky! Yes, and don't look like that! I was there, and every minute of the time I was so in love with you that it used to kill me to see you. So don't try to tell me how it feels to be in love. Or how it's different from being wild about someone. That's one thing I'm the expert on!"

For a moment she was silent, but the hurt in her eyes had gone. Even the tenderness was now withdrawn. He had a fleeting memory of her imperiousness as she had stepped off the train on her return from Philadelphia, and once again she was the girl he had never touched.

"I never said there was nothing left for Ken," she said quietly. "After all, he's the first person I ever knew through and through. For the rest of my life, I'll know very few people as well as I know him. And because of that, Ken will always be able to talk to me in a way other men would never dare to, and deep in my heart I'll have to admit that he has the right. But none of that means I love him the way I once did. How can I prove it?" she asked helplessly. "Do you want to lock me in a room with him?"

"Don't be silly —"

"Don't *you* be silly," she retorted. "Either you believe me or you don't. You always used to talk to Ken about the kind of chances that were worth taking. Well, I'm one of the chances you'll have to decide about."

He looked at her somberly and then turned away.

"You'd be the least of my risks," he said, at last.

"Thank you."

"I didn't mean it that way." His voice was quiet and thoughtful. "Before you came, I found myself thinking of a way to prove to the Patent Office that our work is original. We can still get our patent if I'm right. But what is more important is that this is the moment — now, tonight — to shake out Brock before Stewart knows that we intend to reapply. Shaking out Brock means taking a long chance and taking it fast. There's a connection between that and what you and I were just talking about."

"What is it?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's just that I feel different about what seemed an impossible risk until you came." He held out his hand to her.

"Then you *do* believe me," she said. "Ah, Davy, please!"

"Yes," he said slowly. He closed his eyes as she caressed his face against her bosom. "I guess I do."

6

When Davy got back to the barn a few minutes after midnight, he was surprised to find Ken awake and waiting for him in the office. Ken leaped up to meet him.

"Where have you been?" Ken demanded. "I've been trying to get in touch with you everywhere! I think I've found a way to lick that rejection."

"Did you call me at Stewart's?" Davy was suddenly sharp.

"I tried the office, but you weren't there."

"I meant his home."

"Well, yes, why?"

"Did you talk to him?"

"I just asked if you were there."

"But you didn't say that you had found a way out, did you?"

"No," Ken said slowly. "I was about to, but I thought I'd check with you first."

"I got an idea too, but let's hear yours first."

"Well, our argument ought to be that the principle of electron scanning isn't even original with this Westinghouse man they cited, but is public domain ever since that Russian patent expired —"

"I went at it differently. I want to put the emphasis on what's being scanned — not the scanning itself."

"Then it's practically the same approach," Ken said with triumph. "The Westinghouse man neutralizes surface charge. We neutralize *space* charge. We scan a potential field and he operates on a force field. Do you think we can convince an examiner of the basic difference?"

"We've just got to keep hammering at it. Between you and me, though, there's a much more important difference between the two systems — this other fellow has Westinghouse behind him and we don't have anybody."

"We have Brock, for what he's worth."

"We don't have Brock. We bought him out less than half an hour ago. That's where I was when you couldn't get me."

"We *what*?"

"We shook him out. That's what you've been wanting, isn't it?"

"Oh, my God!" Ken said in dismay. "That patent rejection made everything different. We're in no position to be tough. And what about that aviation radio deal?"

"That's off, too."

"Jesus," Ken said helplessly. "What have you done? Even at the very best — let's assume that our argument can meet the examiner's objections — we're in for a long patent fight. Where are we supposed to get the money for that?"

"Certainly not from Brock — under any conditions. You don't think he'd let us take money from a new radio business to pour down what he'd call a rathole?"

"We could have made that one of the conditions of the deal."

Davy shook his head. "He'd never live up to it. We'd have to be fighting Brock as a partner just as hard as we'd be fighting Westinghouse. I thought of all that. As soon as I saw there was a way out, I decided to take a long chance. I called and asked if I could come over to see him. He came downstairs in an old bathrobe. I told him that we both knew how disappointed he was in the whole project; and that this Patent Office rejection was probably the last straw for him. He didn't deny it! I told him that you and I felt pretty bad about the whole thing, and since we planned to stay in business here we wanted to help him cut his losses. I offered him ten cents on the dollar and he accepted on the spot. He thinks we're nice fellows again. Now we own ourselves once more."

"Ten cents on the dollar! He put up fifty thousand dollars, so that means we owe him five thousand! We've got to eat, and we still have to promote the patent. And we don't have a dime between us. You and your long chances! Who the hell outsmarted who?"

"Nobody. Suppose I hadn't done it. Where would we be? We weren't ever going to get any more money from him and we'd have him on our necks for the rest of our lives, once things panned out for us. We're lucky to get back our stock because we're positive that we can still make a success of it. And he figures that he's lucky to get back five thousand because he's just as positive that we'll never amount to anything. For that lack of confidence, alone, we can't afford to keep him as a partner. Hell, he put up his money and took his chances. We gave him as fair a run as we could. He has no kick coming, nor have we."

"But now that we own ourselves, what do we own? Where do we get the money to pay him? How do we eat?"

"I figured that out too. We're going to have to reopen the garage, Ken. We're going to fix flats, change oil — the old dirty grind, and we work nights and spare time on our project just the way we used to. Margot said she'd send us fifty a week. We'll give that fifty to Brock. And that's where I've been all night."

Ken stared at him for a long time, slowly shaking his head. "You're absolutely crazy, Davy! But I'll have to back you up. Just the same, I hope Brock changes his mind by tomorrow morning. Look at you!" he burst out. "You've just ruined us; and yet there you sit — on top of the world. What kind of sandwiches did Vicky bring? Were you chewing on lion heart?"

Davy smiled slightly, but his dark eyes were deep with an elation that had to be tempered by pity, for on the tip of his tongue was the truth: "She gave me *your* heart to eat!"

That night, Davy slept restlessly. He seemed to be hurrying downward through the dark tunnel of the dream, pressed by an unnamed obligation. The urgency rode him into the morning and became, when he awakened, an irresistible drive to work. He was as full of ideas for reviving the garage business as he was for the invention.

He harried Ken through breakfast because his impatience for a new start was too great a burden to bear alone; and they were down at the bank to meet Brock even before the first depositors arrived.

"We'd like to get our agreement straightened out as soon as possible, Mr. Brock," Davy said. "Before anybody changes his mind."

Brock was silent, and lightly drummed his finger tips upon the glass desk-top. Davy watched him from behind an impassive face, where his own nervousness was like a flag straining to fly in the wind. Davy guessed that Brock himself was torn between suspicion of the sudden offer and Stewart's private assurance that the patent application was a forlorn hope. Most likely, Brock had called the lawyer as soon as Davy had left the night before.

"How do you expect to pay off this money?" Brock asked at last.

"We'll give you fifty dollars a week for two years," Davy said. "We're going to reopen the garage, and our sister's going to help us out. You see, Ken and I aren't giving up."

"You still feel it can be made to work?" Brock was thrown back on his doubts again.

"*We* think so — provided we get the time and the capital to work on."

"Capital?" Brock tapped the desk and then, having returned to his decision, shook his head again. "No," he said finally. "At the rate you two have been going, it'll take the United States Mint to see you through. I'm content to let you buy us out. I'll ask Charlie Stewart to draw up the papers. I must say that you boys are re-establishing yourselves around here with this deal. People are going to change their tune when they hear of this."

"Change what tune?" Ken asked sharply.

"Well, you know — there's talk, unfair, of course, that you two were pulling a fast one all the time, milking a good thing." His airy ob-

jectivity slipped a little, as if trying to convince them of the fairness of the unfair gossip. "After all, nobody's *seen* anything come out of all that work —"

"But who started all that talk?" Ken demanded. "Don't forget, Mr. Brock, we never went to you for your support. You were the one —"

Brock held up his hand. "I don't know who started it. In a town like this, loose talk just grows out of the ground. As a matter of fact, a lot of people are on your side too. They'll say that I'm a mean old grasping man squeezing the last pennies out of you fellows now that you're down. They'll say it even if the money you're paying back doesn't amount to a hill of beans next to what was put in. Don't think I had an easy time explaining it to my associates." He spoke as if they were too naïve to realize that Thurston had put up his share as only an additional expense to the cost of a desperate week end. "If you really want to know, the only reason I'm taking it is to give you two a chance to clear your name around here — with both sides."

"That's all I had to hear!" Ken said as they left. He was walking fast in anger. "We're going to pull this thing through if it kills us. Let's get over to Stewart's and start right now on that patent reply."

"We're not going near Charlie Stewart until this separation agreement is signed, sealed and delivered," Davy said. "We'll do our own planning at the barn all by ourselves for a day or so. So take that look off your face and droop a bit. As far as everyone else is concerned, we're Mr. Flop and his brother."

At the barn, with nothing to do but wait, their angry optimism began to falter. Ken stood silently by the window, clasping and unclasping his hands in some silent harangue of bitterness, while Davy walked through the tiers of apparatus. He had only to glance about him to add up the single days of the past few years. Each job, by itself, had been a miraculous success of perseverance, insight and creativeness. Only the sum total was a failure so far.

He wandered back into the office.

"We've made a mistake by applying for only the single patent," he said to Ken. "There must be at least twenty original inventions that we cooked up along the way as a matter of routine. And each one could have a dozen uses apart from what we've done with them. We ought to get them all down on paper. As long as we're taking stock, let's figure in *all* the assets. And let's do it before we get bogged down with the details of the garage."

"The garage — that's what sticks in my craw!" Ken said. He turned,

making a helpless gesture with his hands. "It sounded fine and heroic, but it's crazy. When we were going to school, that was one thing. But that kind of small change is a joke now. We'll have to use Stewart to prosecute the basic patent and he's not going to go along with us on scratch. You want to try for twenty more patents: that's going to cost even more. On top of that, we're going to have to buy equipment to keep the project going."

"What do you have in mind?"

Impulse sparkled in Ken's eyes, and he smiled slightly.

"Listen, you went to Brock and made a deal all on your own. Now, it's *my* turn for a little independent action." He picked up the telephone and called a number. "Mr. Thorne, please — Mel? This is Ken. . . . What do you hear from that son of a bitch boss of yours? How does he like seeing his stock take a nose dive? . . . Hell, the stockholders ought to be glad he's gone! I'm calling you to talk business, Mel boy. How many planes do you have building right now? . . . Everybody can't be canceling just because that lunatic walked out on you. . . . I've got an idea that might help you. How about asking your nervous customers if they want two-way radios installed? Same high-class workmanship that went into the Falcon, and if the order is big enough we'll make you a rate —"

"If Brock should hear — !" Davy cried in anger.

"And don't send out those queries except by mail," Ken said, without glancing at his brother. "Better still, I'll come right over and talk to you. We've got a new setup here now. And pull yourself together. All these cancellations and this stock stuff is just a flurry. You'll make better planes without that bastard! I'll be right there, boy."

He hung up; and with his hands still on the instrument, he smiled at Davy.

"Now I'll make a deal with *you*, brother. You get to work on the patents, and I'll support you with aviation radio."

"What are you going to use for capital, Ken? You won't be able to raise a dime from Brock. He'll scream bloody murder when he hears about this."

"Let him scream, I'll love it! I'll ask Mel for an advance on every order. Poor guy, he sounds as if the place had fallen down on him. Davy, for God's sake, we *know* about money now. We've spent fifty thousand dollars in our brief time, and don't you forget it. I can say *ten thousand dollars* as easily as I used to say *ninety-eight cents*. Last night, I could have killed you when you walked in here with your

bright idea. Now I'm on top of the world myself. Do you want to come and talk to Mel, too?"

"No," said Davy, smiling. "That's your department. I've got my own work to look after."

He watched Ken stride out to the car, and noted the set of his head as he drove away — high, determined, almost gay. It was simply that Ken had been challenged, Davy thought. A man named Brock had told him that he wasn't really Ken, and so Ken was now going to prove that he was. Davy still smiled, but he shook his head ruefully.

Chapter Nine

For six weeks, through the end of winter and into the beginning of spring, Davy raced through the crowded routine of busy days with Ken. He barely had time to look up and smile a greeting when Vicky came in every evening, red-faced from the cold. Most of the time, Ken didn't even notice her arrival. He seemed almost a hermit at his special assembling table. He had talked Mel Thorne into installing two-way radios in the five airplanes which the plant had managed to salvage from the first avalanche of orders and subsequent deluge of cancellations. Along with the order, Ken managed to obtain an advance of seven hundred dollars, which permitted Davy to concentrate on building up a body of invention records.

To handle the patent work, Stewart insisted on a monthly retainer of one hundred and twenty dollars. Davy agreed to the exorbitant price because only he knew exactly how high would be the pile of patent applications when Vicky would finish typing them up.

Vicky worked only at night because she was back at her old job in Seitz's bookstore, where she went when Mel had been forced to lay off half the staff which Doug had hired. She worked tirelessly because she saw that Davy and Ken were in bondage to an idea: they were like prisoners trying to dig their way out of a cell before execution day. Nevertheless, she had no qualms about bullying them into

an evening's relaxation whenever she saw that they were approaching the edge of nervous exhaustion. But, even if she could get them to spend a couple of hours at the early show of a movie, they insisted on hurrying back to the shop for the time that remained until midnight.

Early that spring, when they had become too thin and worn, she began persuading them to move out of the barn and at least sleep and eat in Wallis's house so that she could see that they ate adequately.

The night was soft with April rain. They had just dropped Ken at the shop after a movie and Davy was driving her home around the block before he went back to more work.

Davy shook his head slowly. "Ken would never agree," he said. "I feel funny about it myself. After all, we never did it when we were kids and really hungry. We're getting along."

"You mean you're barely managing to stay alive," she protested. "Davy, it hurts me to see the way you look."

"But it's only for the time being," he said. "You'll see—in a little while . . ."

"In a little while, nothing! Neither of you can keep this up. I'm never sure you've eaten except for the few times you eat with us. That money Margot sends you doesn't do any good. It's gone the minute you get it. . . ."

"And thank God for it," he said. "At least it keeps Brock off our necks . . ."

"But I've got a salary. Let me lend you some money."

"No."

"Then let Grandpa lend you that money he once promised to."

"When we really need it, Vicky."

"Ah, as if you didn't need it now! You'll never ask."

He laughed. "Don't you worry. When we have to, we will! And thanks for worrying."

She kissed his thin face and her eyes were soft with tenderness. "No thanks to you for making me worry," she said.

During that whole time, Davy and Ken never lost sight of their main object, and two hours were set apart every day for actual experimental work on the apparatus. Usually, it was in the morning, but one evening Vicky came in to find them in a desperate discussion of the basic theory.

"The fault's in the way we assemble the tube," Davy was insisting. "We've eliminated every possibility except our technique."

She went on with her typing, while they took apart the tube over

and over again, reassembled it, each one watching the other as analytically as possible because the error could be something as simple as finger contamination. All evening long they were so absorbed that neither of them spoke to her, but when she got up at ten minutes to twelve to leave, Davy suddenly broke off to accompany her.

"Look, did you notice anything different tonight?" he asked. He sounded happy as if he expected praise.

"You mean the change in routine?"

"No, no," he said impatiently. "In me. Look." He faced her squarely in the darkness with the expectant smile still on his face.

"I drank a quart of milk today," he announced when she said nothing. "And I'm going to do it every day because of what you said the other night. You don't have to worry."

"Oh, Davy!" she said, laughing, and hugged him to her; but she had to hide her face because until this moment she hadn't realized how close she had been to tears for the way he looked.

For two hours, the following night, the tube was subjected to intense furnace heat along with a bombardment by high-frequency radiation designed to reach the metal elements within the glass. Two hours of the scouring heat was all that Ken's nerves could stand, and Vicky heard him protesting over the clatter of her typing.

At eleven o'clock, she put aside her own work and, without asking anyone's permission, began to heat up some soup and stew she had brought along with her.

"Now you take a break and eat," she said.

"Oh, we're through for tonight," Davy said. "God, I *am* starving. We can actually make a run tomorrow evening."

"Good, then you can get some sleep when you're through eating."

Davy looked at her, surprised at her misunderstanding.

"I meant we were through with the apparatus," he said. "Now we've got to get to work on the stuff we *should* have been doing." He saw her expression. "Only until one," he pleaded. "We'll knock off then."

"Then I'll wait," she said. "I won't go home until I actually see you in bed."

When she came in the next night, Davy was already in the viewing booth. He called to her to join him while Ken placed the cross-marked slide into position. Vicky's exultant gasp sent Ken running to see the results.

The improvement was phenomenal. Until now, they had been satis-

fied to see a solid cross partially free of the obscuring mists; but today the cross was so clearly defined that Vicky could distinguish the hair marks of the brush that had splotched the rough mark. For fifteen long seconds they all sat there in mute devotion to the miracle, and for that length of time, the image never wavered on the luminous screen.

"What do we do now?" asked Ken in a whisper, as if fearful that the living clarity could be startled out of existence. "Let's make something move there — anything at all, but for Christ's sake, let's do something! Quick!"

"Get the glass slide out and move a long thin stick past the opening," said Davy. "All we'll see is a moving silhouette, but what the hell, it'll be movement! Hurry up before something happens."

To remove the slide, Ken had to turn off the scorching arcs. In his excitement he burnt himself but he didn't care. One by one the arcs came back and Vicky saw Davy sit rigidly, without daring to breathe.

The luminous screen glowed clearly, and then a black bar suddenly materialized. Vicky saw it jump, rise and fall several times with a crazily erratic movement, but it *was* movement and not flicker. Then, just as Davy was about to call Ken, a rolling fog on the screen suddenly obscured the stick.

"What did you do?" Davy called angrily.

"Moved the screw driver. Did you see it?"

"And then what?"

"Nothing. I kept moving it. What happened?"

"You didn't touch anything else?"

"Positive. What the hell happened?"

"For a minute, we really had it, Ken. But the damn fog came on as thick as ever and now I can't see anything. Hold the screw driver still."

Through the murk, the straight, blade-edged bar reached across the screen, but reception was no clearer than it had been before.

For a moment, though, the miracle had happened, and so the long search had to continue. This time the goal was to find out what had happened, so that the moment of brilliant clarity could be prolonged to hours, and from hours to a tube's entire lifetime.

Thursday was Vicky's half day off, and she went directly from the store to the workshop. She had been there only half an hour when the telephone rang. She was startled by the sound, for not until then did she realize that in all the months she had been coming, there had been

no interruption from the outside world. She answered. Brock's secretary was calling Davy.

"Mr. Mallory?" The woman's tiny voice sounded as if the banker's cool eyes were watching her while she repeated the message which he had made her memorize. "In this morning's mail, there was no check from you. Mr. Brock wants to know if you mailed it yesterday."

"No check?" Davy looked up at Vicky, startled.

"That's right," Vicky said. "There *was* no check from Margot this week!"

"When is it due?" Davy asked into the telephone.

"Your week ends on Thursday. And that's today."

Davy looked as if the casual words—*your week*—had suddenly tightened a net about him. Vicky wondered what would happen to the agreement with Brock if a payment failed. Perhaps Brock could reclaim his interest just as if he were foreclosing on a mortgage. Up until that moment, they had all forgotten that the banker must have been watching them just as he watched everyone in town. Davy looked frightened.

The secretary went on. "Mr. Brock would like you and your brother to stop in this afternoon."

Davy hastily got out the bankbook. Vicky knew what was there—only thirty-five dollars because, by pure chance, some bills had been paid. He put his hand over the mouthpiece, frowning.

"Davy!" she called him gently.

He glanced at her, disturbed, and then slowly he began to see her. She said nothing, praying that he would prove his acceptance of her as part of his life. He looked almost shy as he said: "Vicky, would you please lend me fifty dollars?"

"I'd love to lend you fifty dollars."

He smiled and removed his hand from the telephone.

"Tell Mr. Brock that I can't make it today," he said. "Of course, if Mr. Brock wants to come out here, he can save me the special messenger who'll be bringing in the payment."

"What's happened to Margot?" Vicky asked when he had hung up. "Has she ever been late before?"

"Never. Something's as wrong as hell."

He rose, on the point of calling out to Ken, but he thought better of it. Instead, he picked up the telephone again and dictated the message to Western Union: "Is anything the matter? Wire immediate reply."

Vicky had already put on her hat and coat. She was hurrying out to be the special messenger, as if fearful that Davy would change his mind.

2

Carl Bannerman was the only one in the hotel room who noticed the telegram being handed to Margot. The bellboy had knocked, entered, and then, when he noticed that there was some kind of business conference going on, he tiptoed swiftly to her through the expensive cigar smoke and sunlight.

Three months of being completely ignored had shattered all but the outer shell of Carl's self-confidence, and this conference today had only continued the process. He was left battered, bored and insignificant by the rapid and expert exchange of technicalities far beyond his comprehension. Simply out of habit, he managed to look intelligent; but inwardly he was aware that he was a failure, facing sixty, and that the world had passed him by.

He watched Margot glance over the message. From her strained expression he formed the wild hope that she would stand up and announce a catastrophe so devastating that whatever anyone had accomplished up until now could have no meaning because every survivor would have to start even. But Margot simply folded away the message and returned to her dictation pad. Carl's hopes continued to plummet to unbearable depths of blackness.

Yet only three months before, when he first picked up the hastily scrawled interoffice memo, he had stood on the highest pinnacle of elation. Not until he had seen the word *Hollywood* in Vollrath's handwriting had he ever dreamed of going there, but from that instant he was a changed man. He had always been tormented by sudden fits of self-loathing for the sham and shabbiness of his life, moments of fierce insistence to himself that one of these days he would find something with real *class*. At that moment, he saw that his lifelong hope of finding something with *class* was actually the dream of finding a place, a world, where what he knew and did best was understood as an honorable activity — where he himself, exactly as he was, would have *class*. For Hollywood was the one place on earth where illusion was an industry, and illusion was the one art in which Carl felt himself a master craftsman.

He followed Vollrath's and Margot's course several days behind them, but wherever he stopped he was able to pick up the trail of the big Cunningham. In the first few places, they registered separately: Mr. Vollrath and Miss Mallory. In one town in Missouri, they suddenly became Mr. and Mrs. Atkins, but they were heard to have a terrific row and Mrs. Atkins slammed out of the hotel room and was halfway to the railroad station before Mr. Atkins jumped into the car and brought her back. Three hundred flat miles later, the Cunningham was still being driven by Mr. and Mrs. Atkins and there was no fuss that anyone could notice. Out in Utah, though, Mr. Vollrath and Miss Mallory had separate rooms, and the waitress said they didn't talk to each other at all. In Phoenix, Mr. and Mrs. Atkins were taken for honeymooners, but across the desert and over the pass in the big hotel in Hollywood, Mr. Vollrath had the five-room suite and his secretary Miss Mallory had a room of her own the floor below. Mr. Vollrath wasn't in — was there any message?

For weeks Mr. Vollrath wasn't in, but his name was in all the newspapers because of the killing he had made with the dumping of the aviation stock. For three days the sale had been the front-page story because some senator was demanding an explanation for the drop of thirty-two dollars in less than a week. But Vollrath issued no statements; and when the noise blew away, he was referred to as the glamorous boy financier who had picked up a cool six million.

His name took on an aura of mystery and success and began appearing in the motion-picture trade papers, which Carl now read avidly. There was continual mention of him coupled familiarly with Lasky, Laemmle, DeMille, Schenck and Burley. He was rumored to be engaged to one of the most inaccessible actresses in the colony, and one paper even ran what purported to be an exclusive interview: how the world-famous star and the daredevil young financier had each found in the other the perfect soul mate so that now they could both settle down in a cream-white mansion, and raise a family of children just like everybody else. The denials were short and dignified.

Week after week, Mr. Vollrath wasn't in, and Carl had his increasingly desperate conversations with Margot on the telephone, except for the one time when they had lunch together. He was surprised at the change in her. Her skin was tanned and her hair was cut to fall in short soft curls but her expression was strained.

"Tell me one thing," Carl insisted. "Does Vollrath know I'm alive?"

"Carl," she said impatiently, "you're getting paid, aren't you?"

"But it's a funny thing, kiddo; that boy is doing something to me that nobody ever did before. When you stop to think, I'm right on top of the world — but I'm like a bear with a sore head."

"Well, things are tough for everybody."

"I'm not kidding. For over thirty years I had a dream that finally comes true and I find it's no good. That means thirty years shot to hell. You know what I've decided the trouble is?"

"No, Mr. Bones, what is the trouble?"

"The trouble is that my pride is hurt. At long last, I want to be working at what I do best, and this snot-nose peels off a few bills every Saturday and says 'take that great gift of yours and shove it.' That hurts."

"Why don't you quit?"

"Why don't you relax? What the hell has Vollrath got that keeps everyone who works for him from having fun? And I give you my word that I'm not sore about the stock deal. I had my own hundred and fifty shares. If I had been tipped off that he was going to unload like that, I could have cashed in for forty-five hundred. But what the hell, it's only money."

"All right, all right. Exactly what do you want, Carl?"

He stared at her. "Jesus, I don't know — I guess — well, *respect*. That's it, I want some respect from him."

"You ain't a-gonna get it," she said crisply. "What else?"

"You're not happy either, kid, are you?" he asked sympathetically.

"Sure, I am. I've got everything a girl could want."

"Go on! That tone of voice of yours tells the story. You're like me — you got everything you want and it's no damn good!"

"I'm *not* like you — because when I get to the point of deciding it's no damn good, I'll quit."

"Well, I'm not quitting. I'm going to show that guy!"

How little he actually had to show anybody was a realization that started when he went to a small theater to see a Norma Shearer picture. In his seat at first, he felt quite professional, looking for the kind of details he had read about in movie interviews; but almost immediately he relaxed and became entranced, carried away by the magic of storytelling. When Norma Shearer wept he secretly wept for her and thought: "If only she knew how understanding *I* could be!"

Carl blinked when the lights came on, for in his imagination he was seeing another movie where the scene was — Years later, the im-

pressive office of Carl Bannerman, the Man Behind American Entertainment. Enter Norma Shearer, still lovely and hardly faded, even though the Great Parade of Fans has long passed her by. The beautiful lips move, the luminous eyes are tear-dimmed, and then the printed legend flashes on the screen: "Carl, Carl, what am I to do?"

The somber-eyed, distinguished magnate rises slowly from his desk with his gaze on the lovely creature before him. His face broods. His lips move.

The legend flashes: "Do you know how long I've waited for this moment, Norma?"

Back to her face. She shakes her head — she never dreamed — Then a shot of his face again — reminiscent, seeing far horizons.

The legend flashes: "Norma, when I first came to this town, unknown, weary, I stepped one night into a little movie theater —"

The titan's face dissolves into a movie theater, and he is seen seated in the audience gazing up at the screen which shows the star at the height of her haunting beauty. Her face in the picture within a picture is a mask of tragedy as she lifts a rose to her cheek and then despairingly lets it fall. Her head droops and there the picture ends. The house lights go on, and the great magnate — then an unknown figure, is seen slowly getting to his feet. The crowd jostles him as they hurry past up the aisle — but anyone under that marquee ought to be able to see that he is someone unique, poorly clad though he is. He moves his lips as if making a dedicated vow. He pauses to light a cigar —

Carl sighed aloud, a fat little man, shaking himself out of a dream. The match flared and slowly burned away the mist of fantasy that had glazed his eyes; and he stood there, seeing himself with bitter clarity as a strutting little fat man deluding himself more than he had ever fooled anyone else. An ineffectual little mark who had nothing of any value to anyone, and never would have.

The summons from Vollrath, peremptory as always, came to him with a shock of surprise. The living room of Vollrath's suite looked as big as a theater lobby — with dark oak beams, red tapestry hangings and wrought-iron fixtures. There were three men besides Vollrath and the ash trays showed they had been there for some time. Vollrath greeted Carl as affably as if they had parted only a few hours before.

"Sit down, Carl, I want you to listen in and then we're going to ask your advice. Let me introduce you around."

Two of the three men looked at Carl with polite hostility. In spite of their handsome clothes and their obvious authority, they could

have been small-town bank tellers whose basic fact of life was that they might displease a domineering president. The fourth man, impeccable, dry, well over sixty, with rheumy gray eyes that seemed to peer out of a mask of wet autumn leaves, was the bank president. The small-town analogy was knocked out of Carl's mind as soon as he heard the man's name — this was Percy Burley, the man who had broken Griffith.

Burley sat very still with his hands lightly clasped, as if he knew — and was not bothered by — all the stories that circulated about him, neither the supposedly unsolved murder on his yacht, nor the suicide of one of his stars at the height of her career. Carl sat down quietly, almost demurely, because being near Burley was like being in the presence of Death.

In another moment, the talk was resumed and the two nervous men swung and clattered like beads on a string suspended between Vollrath and Burley. Carl had already prepared his modest disclaimer: "Sorry, can't help you fellows," should any question be directed at him, but he felt sick.

Besides Margot, there was another girl taking notes; Margot looked cold and withdrawn. The telegram left her face unchanged.

"Well, Carl, this brings us to you." Carl jumped at the sound of his name. "What do *you* think?"

Carl wet his lips. "Sorry," he said and, to his own surprise, spoke with a booming tone. "Can't help you fellows at all."

"Why not?" Doug sounded sharp.

"Because — because you don't have what I call a show. I don't have any experience in movies." Again, instead of sounding apologetic, the words were full of patient deprecation. The past three months may have broken his spirit, but not his outer manner. He felt like a watery oyster, shrunken and flabby, lost within the formidable shell, but he peered out from behind his armor and saw no contempt in all the eyes that were fixed upon him. He heard his own voice boom on. "Not that my interests run only to the more established categories of entertainment — I've already served my time in radio, new as it is, and I've even protected myself against the future with forms of communication still in the laboratory. But, Mr. Burley — gentlemen — I don't give a damn what the medium is, the old principles still hold. Those are the principles I go by. And that's why I call myself a showman."

So far, he had extemporized. He saw that he still held them, and he had an intuition that the key was the word "showman."

"A Showman," he said again. "And there's only one basic show, Mr. Burley and gentlemen — that is the Circus!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Bannerman." The thinnest middle-aged man wore tortoise-rim glasses which gave him a look of nervous intelligence, but to Carl, who had studied under Tight Pants Charlie Hand, the interruption signaled a challenge. Carl widened his eyes blandly. "Nobody denies that the circus makes a wonderful show, but we can't make *Pagliacci* forever —"

"The principles, young man," Carl said, smothering him gently merely by holding up his hand. "The principles are under discussion. You, I take it, are a playwright —"

The eyes behind the glasses blinked. He was used to having his name recognized. For an instant of savagery, Carl hoped that he was one of those Pulitzer Prize guys. "A Showman, young fellow, is not so concerned with human behavior on the stage. What interests a Showman is human behavior in the audience — *any* audience at all. Let me prove to you that the theater is not basic —"

"Not basic! Why, for Christ's sake, Sophocles —"

"Do you write *your* plays like Sophocles? Theater is a matter of fashion, my boy; and fashions change. But audiences don't; and the Circus doesn't." He smiled so that any attack from the playwright would appear to be only bad temper. "What I know today, I learned in the postgraduate school of Sawdust. And it's because I know whereof I speak, Mr. Burley, that I can safely say that the project you and Doug have been discussing is no damn good. There isn't a nickel's worth of Showmanship anywhere in it."

"Now, just a minute, Carl —" Vollrath said quickly.

Once again, Carl held up his hand. *This'll teach you, you son of a bitch, to think you can get along without me!* "Let me tell you about the Circus, and you'll see what I mean. Everything has a reason. Take the parade with its color, music, costumes — a whole crowd of beautiful, unbelievable people right out of a dream world. A crowd so big — and here's the point — it looks as if the dream world has more people in it than the one that's real, by God! The procession goes smiling by so that every single person in the audience thinks that all the smiles are just for him — get it, not the poor slob next to him. The show starts. One after another out come all the different kinds of heroes: the strong man, the magician, the lion tamer, even the clown. There's a hero to fit every dream. Finally comes the greatest hero of them all: the high-wire man. Nobody in the movies except Fairbanks can ever

match the high-wire man. Look at him up there. Ten thousand pairs of eyes are on him. Ten thousand pairs of lungs stop breathing. Ten thousand hearts stop beating. The spotlights catch him up there all alone. He takes his first step — sort of testing the empty air. He sways a little — then another step — Why, he's walking one step at a time over every naked nerve in your body! And as for the ladies — was there ever a heroine as lovely, as delicate as the lady bareback rider? All right, now you square your story up against that. Where's your color, your music, your excitement, your dream? Your people aren't even rich! Who's your hero in the story? Is he the strong man, a magician, or the high-wire man? No, he's just a nice guy. To hell with him — Everybody in your audience considers himself a nice guy, and so it's not part of a dream."

"Very well." Burley spoke for the first time and he sounded amused. "You're telling us why the story's no good, even though it's supposed to cost fifty thousand for the rights. What's *your* idea of a good story, Mr. Bannerman?"

"I'm a Showman, Mr. Burley. Not a writer. Any more than I'm a high-wire man."

"Just the same you must have some idea."

Carl was cautious. The first dictum of Tight Pants Charlie Hand — never outexpert a mark in his own field; just find out what he would swallow for bait.

"Let me try a little experiment, Mr. Burley," he said. "When you look back in life, what was the one thing you remember wanting more than anything — something you knew there wasn't a ghost of a chance you'd get."

Burley thought for a moment, and his face softened slightly. "A pony, I guess. A pony with a fancy saddle."

A poor kid, thought Carl.

"All right," he said aloud. "I want you to picture a poor, ragged boy — with his sensitive little face pressed up between the bars of a high iron fence running around a big estate. He's looking at a bunch of rich people getting on riding horses that the stable fellows are holding. There have to be a lot of riders, that's our pageant. But our ragged kid isn't watching the riders, he's watching a pony with a handsome saddle, and nobody is there to get on it — nobody. Can you see that little boy and what he's looking at, Mr. Burley?"

Burley nodded; and because he did, the oldest of the two other men said, "It's visual, all right —"

"And a little girl with golden curls darts out of the house and slips into the saddle," said the writer sourly.

Carl looked at him. A little girl *had* been about to do just that, but now she wouldn't. No God-damn little girl with golden curls would even get into the story!

"No little girl," Carl said. "We're still talking about that boy and that pony —" He turned to Doug. "Now you tell me what it is you once wanted the way Mr. Burley wanted his pony."

Ordinarily, Doug would have shrugged him off, but Burley's softening was contagious.

"There was never anything you could buy that I wanted that way," he said. "I knew I could have had it if I just asked. What I used to want kept changing. For a while I thought I wanted to be a great painter. After my father struck oil he bought everything he thought a rich man ought to have, and then someone told him he couldn't rate with the really big ones until he owned some old masters. So he went to Duveen's and took me with him. There were some pictures that hit me so hard, tears almost came to my eyes and that's what I wanted to be. Jesus, my hands used to ache to make something good, but everything turned out ordinary. Then I thought I wanted to be a composer —"

"I like the painting part," Carl said. He turned back to Burley. "You still see your little boy? And that pony across the lawn? Do you know why that saddle is empty? The rich boy, whose pony it is, is discovered standing by that same iron fence, but hidden from the poor boy by a big stone pillar. And the rich boy is looking *out* at a painting left on the sidewalk which the poor boy was delivering for his father, who is a great artist, starving and still undiscovered —"

"It's visual, all right," said the gray-haired man. "Look, you open with a medium-long shot *down* the lawn looking out — looking *out*; get it. But the picture is framed on one side by the pillar so all you see is the poor boy looking in. Cut to a close shot of the boy yearning. Get his clothes for pathos. Then cut to from behind the boy's shoulders to a long shot of the house, stables and people. They take their wealth for granted by the way they smile to each other and ignore the grooms who are adjusting the stirrup straps and saddle cinches or whatever the hell you call them. Pan through the crowd to the pony. Then back close to the boy. He loves that pony. Then back to the pony and the crowd. The mounted riders turn their heads, looking around. A groom shrugs as if asked where the little rider can be. General im-

patience. Long shot now down the rolling lawn with the pillar now in the *middle* of the picture. A small figure seen looking *out*, forlorn. Then quick a close shot of that rich boy looking out the fence—some expression as on the poor boy. Cut back and forth. One boy looking in—one boy looking out. What's the rich boy looking at? A painting! Hold for a few frames to catch ironic contrast. Then the two boys see each other—"He faltered, having run out of story. "Christ, I *like* it!"

"I'd like it too if it had a plot," the writer remarked. "Hell, anybody can cook up a scene. One man slowly points a gun at another, and the audience sits breathless, but then what? And why?"

"But this is different," Burley said coldly. "There are no guns here, no melodrama. Furthermore, the opening sequence suggests a story. Two attractive boys from opposite poles of society, each having what the other wants most—"

"And so each falls in love with the other's sister."

Again they were about to, but once more Carl changed the story.

"No," he said, remembering how he had felt about the Norma Shearer picture. "They both grow up friends but fall in love with the same girl. To the poor boy, she's the golden princess who understands his desire, to build railroads like her father. To the rich boy, she's the one who understands his dream of becoming a great painter in spite of the fact that his parents want him to take over the family empire and only sneer at artists. She's two different girls, get it? And she shimmers from one possibility to another, like the beautiful bareback rider—She *is* the bareback rider."

"That could make a wonderful part," the writer grudgingly admitted. "Only no dame in this town acts more than one expression a day. You'd have to shoot the different personalities at either end."

"Well, schedules—" said the gray-haired director.

But Carl noticed a heavy silence between Vollrath and Burley. Both of them were looking slightly hostile. Quick panic dissolved the new self-confidence Carl had found, until perception dawned on him. For God's sake—they were jealous of each other!

"But the girl dies," Carl said quickly. "Before you can tell which one she really loves."

"You mean that each man believes that he alone was the one?" Burley asked. The solution displeased his vanity.

"Oh no, no!" Carl replied. "Just the other way around. Each fellow thinks she loved the *other* fellow. But they don't discover this until

an epilogue—" He himself loved soft-focus epilogues which were the equivalent of saying *They lived happily ever after*. "This epilogue is at the country estate of the poor boy, now a millionaire with a beautiful wife. The rich boy, now a world-famous artist, is visiting him with *his* beautiful wife. The old friends watch the sunset. The millionaire engineer goes inside for a minute and comes out with a photograph of the girl who died. He hands it to the artist. 'Here,' he says. 'I meant to give you this years ago. She loved you best.' The artist shakes his head sadly and opens his watch. In it is the girl's picture. 'No, *you* were the one. I saw it at the end.' They smile and each one feels better. They exchange pictures and we know now that the girl will live forever."

"Couldn't we make it a little more sentimental?" the writer asked dryly.

"That's why I like it," Burley said. "What about you, Doug? Any idiot could shoot a million holes in it as it stands, but I mean the general feel."

Doug hesitated, and Carl suddenly perceived that the original story and the playwright had been Doug's contribution. In effect, Carl realized, he had just finished queering Doug's pitch.

"Well, Mr. Burley," Doug said, "I respect your opinion, and I respect Carl's judgment. However I'd like to see more detail. What do you say, Wilber?" he addressed the writer. "Would you care to build this into a finished synopsis?"

"I'd have to think about it," the man said coldly. "Does Mr.—?" "Bannerman," said Carl.

"—Bannerman have any more ideas?"

"No," said Carl. "I told you I'm no writer. I'm just a Showman."

"But you'd work along with Wilber, wouldn't you, Carl?"

Carl shook his head, smiling. "I'd be glad to check over the finished story, though—in a sort of supervisory way," he added with bland innocence, and Burley nodded.

The conference was over, Vollrath was vastly pleased with Carl, but Carl was exhausted—not from the exertion, but with a sort of cold emptiness. What depressed him most deeply was his knowledge that he had conned both Burley and Vollrath.

He had found the place where he had *class*, all right, but only as long as he relied on the con. There was no place in the world where he could be legitimate, and now he saw that there never would be.

Like all the marks he had ever laughed at because of their slavery to

a dream, he saw that he too had always been the dream-happy victim of his own foolish fancy. Well, the dream was over but he missed it achingly. He smiled at the conversation about him; he nodded with grave importance at these important men who asked his advice; but the fun was all gone. He wished he knew where the Norma Shearer picture was playing. He was in just the mood for a good movie.

3

For Doug, the conference had been a complete success. At first he had been annoyed by Carl's brassy assurance, particularly because of the nerve-racking job of getting Wilberforce out to the Coast. The daily long-distance calls to the writer's Connecticut home had been a strain of suppressed impatience with the man's half-whining airiness; and while Wilberforce was undoubtedly talented, his stubborn refusal was what made the challenge. Doug knew very well that the writer made a parade of each conversation to his friends, making Doug the usual stereotype of Hollywood ignoramus; and that too made Doug more determined than ever to make the man surrender.

More than that, Wilberforce's prestige had been the lever under Burley's interest, and Doug needed Burley's distribution facilities. Calling Carl had been only a last-minute afterthought. Doug had expected Carl to make some ordinary nod of approval, and the conversation would have swept along on its original course.

For things to have turned out as they did, was more to Doug's taste than he realized at first. Burley, a dollar-and-cents businessman, hated impresarios and temperament. Although Carl's manner was a mixture of breeziness and a pomposity that verged on crudeness, he had put complete stress on the audience, and to Burley that meant paid admissions.

But the deepest satisfaction was the demolition of the writer—a completely unjustified satisfaction, Doug had to admit, because the original story showed far more taste and sensibility than Carl's absurd concoction; only what the hell, if it stuck in the writer's craw, let him go back to Connecticut and add this incident to his string of Hollywood horror stories. But Doug knew that the writer was not going back. He probably needed the money—well, let the bastard earn it with his pride!

Once again, Doug was warmed by this further proof that his luck

was almost awe-inspiring. He shook his head and laughed, for no matter how he made his plans, something always turned up to make the outcome better than his expectations.

Like the aviation deal. He was willing to swear on a stack of Bibles that the last thing in his mind when he had bought the broken-down plant was any idea of an enormous profit. He had honestly wanted to build the best planes possible. And he had succeeded. The whole country had proof that he had succeeded.

He had become bored, that was all; and if a man is bored with an investment, why shouldn't he obey his impulse to dump the whole thing? There was never any reason why the stock should be priced so high. Hell, that had been fixed in somebody's office back East. And again, he would swear he hadn't realized that the race had made his name such magic that the news of his withdrawal would create a collapse. That was just tough on the suckers who had come crowding in. The plain fact, as Vollrath saw it, was that he had grown bored with a business; and because he was bored he had cleaned up six million dollars. How could any man miss with luck like that?

Doug closed the door of the suite and turned around with his hands outspread in satisfaction, but there was nobody at the moment to congratulate him. Margot had opened all the windows and was now clearing the ash trays. The other girl, whom he had barely noticed before, was bending over her notes, making last-minute corrections for herself. She became aware of Doug and glanced up with frightened eyes.

"How many copies do you want of this, Mr. Vollrath?"

"Ask Miss Mallory. She's the boss here," he said, laughing.

But Margot was in no mood for humor, and he was annoyed to see from her quick precise movements that another quarrel was on its way.

"A copy for us, one for Mr. Burley," said Margot, tapping the last ash tray against the rim of the wastebasket. "You'll want one for Wilberforce too, won't you?"

"Sure," said Doug. "And that's all. What would you like best for lunch, Margot?"

"Nothing," she replied, ignoring his plea to put away her withheld thunder. "All right, Miss North, you can take that down to my room and put it through the machine."

"Why can't she type here?"

Margot glanced up. "Because you always complain about the clatter — particularly after a conference."

"Oh, all right. All right." He sighed; he was trapped, but Margot's

scenes were meaning less and less to him. What he minded most, he told himself, was the waste of time.

"Well, if I don't have any appointment," he said briskly, "I'll go out to lunch."

"Very well."

He could tell that she knew he was escaping; and instinct told him to get out at once. In spite of his better judgment, he paused at the door, saying pleasantly, "Since when have we added a new little member to our family?"

"Miss North?" She paused and looked at him directly. His heart sank; he had stayed too long. He put his hand on the knob, but Margot's reply stopped him. "I'm breaking her in to take my place."

"Oh God, another resignation?" he demanded as his temper boiled up. He was suddenly shaken with fury.

"Don't worry," she was saying. "This is the last one."

"Good! Let it take effect right now!"

"It took effect two weeks ago," she replied. "I haven't drawn a cent of salary since then."

He let his hand fall wearily from the door, distantly surprised with himself for ever thinking that he could go through one of these scenes untouched. More than anything in the world, he wanted to be able to tell her to go to hell and then march out of the room and out of her life.

He remembered the first day he had ever seen her and his inexplicable resentment at his attraction to her. Instinct had warned him then that this would be no ordinary pickup, and he should have had the sense to obey the warning. But whatever excitement she had once infused in him was long since gone—he was sick of her. Never again could she say anything that might surprise him, never again could she warm him with her admiration, nor could they discover any new intimacy. Inside and out—her touch, her scent, her mind—there would never again be anything new about her. And yet, damn it, he could not kick her out or even let her go until that long-past crescendo had died away to its deepest silence.

"What do you want from me, Margot?" he begged. "Am I supposed to ask 'Why' or 'What is it this time' or 'What did I do now'? God, I'm sick to death of explaining and apologizing. And what's the point? I'm the kind of man I am—good or bad. I do the kind of things I do—good or bad. Even if I wanted to, I can't change."

"I know," she said quietly, and he knew that his vehemence had blasted her beyond anger. "I know all that, Doug. And that's why I'm

leaving. I don't have anything more to offer you. Not even any tricks."

"There weren't really tricks, Margot —"

"But there were, Doug," she insisted, not looking at him. Her voice was dead. "I could make you angry, or bait you, or torment you into thinking you want me, for a little while at a time. I know you well enough to be able to do that. And I hung around so that — I wanted you to marry me. From the very beginning, I suppose I had that in mind. Of course then I was in love with you and you were with me — You were once, weren't you?"

"You know I was. And what it is now, I don't even know myself, except —"

"I'm not blaming you," she said sincerely. "And if I sounded angry, the anger wasn't really for you. It's just that after all this time I'm tired of playing one cheap trick on you after another and making believe to myself that because *I'm* the one who's doing it, there can't be any cheapness. That's why I took myself off the payroll," she added with a smile of self-mockery. "Any girl who quits as many times as I have doesn't deserve any two weeks' notice."

"You opened a telegram during the meeting," he said suddenly. "Did that have anything to do with your decision?"

"There's no connection. I made this decision two weeks ago, and the wire just came. It was from Ken and Davy. They hadn't heard from me, and they were worried, that's all. They're doing fine, just fine!"

"Margot!" He called her name desperately out of that odd uneasiness that always assailed him whenever someone wanted to leave him before he himself had given the sign of dismissal. "Isn't there some way you could stay on with me? Out of all the possible ways two people get along, can't we find just one that might work? Talking pure business — I need you."

"You don't need anybody, Doug," she said. "A filing cabinet could give you everything you get from me right now. The one person you need is yourself — that's who you're looking for, all the time, in every place."

"Margot!" he said warningly. "You said there wasn't going to be any blame."

"And there won't be. It was you who said that you're the kind of man who can't change. And yet you're not the kind of man you want to be. I don't think you even know what you want to be!"

"I'm doing fine," he said. He walked to the window, but she held him by an invisible string of fearful suspense — as if a long time ago he had

committed a secret crime undiscovered by anyone, only to find that someone else had known all along. He didn't even know what the crime was, but the penalty, still unnamed, would be unbearable. He wanted desperately for her to go on talking, in the hope that she would eventually reveal that these hints were only a coincidence — and at the same time he wanted to still her blackmailing tongue forever. "I'm doing fine!" he said again.

"All right," she said flatly. "Let's leave it that way."

For as long as he could stand her silence, he stood by the window, pretending to watch the sunny avenue.

"Well, go on!" he cried, turning sharply. "Or is this just another cheap trick to leave me hanging in the air?"

She looked up, meeting his eyes with honest surprise.

"What are you talking about?"

"About me. You said —"

"But you wanted me to stop."

"I want you to talk about it!" He slammed his hand on the back of an armchair. "*Talk* about it, Margot! Talk!"

She shook her head, and for the first time he saw true, boundless sympathy in her gray eyes. It was as if she were very much older than he; so much older that she could understand every fear he had ever felt.

"You mean I'm a failure," he insisted.

"I didn't say that, Doug."

"But you meant it. And I am, Margot, I am!" He groaned. He had finally opened the steel corselet that had been choking him for as long as he could remember. "Every morning, I get up as if I were hounded. In the middle of the night, I find myself suddenly wide awake as if I had been pushed. Hurry hurry hurry — because if I don't make it, I'll die. But make *what*, Margot? What is it that I'm supposed to do? And why should I die if I fail? Christ, tell me!" he shouted. "I *am* different from other men. I'm better. But how do I prove it so I prove it to myself too? All around me I see men who have something that makes them special. Mel Thorne knows planes the way I'll never know them. Take that fatuous fool Wilberforce — take Carl — even your kid brothers — What they have is like a medal that everyone can see. But I don't have any medal, Margot."

"You do, Doug, you do." She stood by his seated figure and pressed his head to her. "You do have a talent and it's an important one. What you have is that you can see other men's ability. To everyone else,

Mel Thorne was just a broken-down war hero — an airport bum. But you alone knew what he had and you got it out of him even if he hated you for it. You gave him the will he never would have had by himself. Carl — you know what Carl was — a tinhorn drifter, but he knows just one thing and you put him in the one place where he can make sense, and he will make *sense* here."

He pressed his head against her bosom, and slipped his arm around her waist. The very familiarity of her body gave him a reassurance so sweet that he could think of no words — he could only feel it, bathe in it, and refresh himself for the war with himself. He wanted never to let go of her. He wanted her beside him in the morning when he awoke so that the hounding hurry would be held at bay. He wanted her next to him in the darkness so that her sympathetic arms could urge him back to peace. She was the only one who had ever heard his confession aloud, and she, the judge, had dismissed the case because the fearful crime — in her court at least — was no crime at all.

"Stay with me, baby," he whispered. "Stay with me."

"No, Doug," she said softly. "This is only the way you feel now. Next week —"

"Next week, it'll be the same. Marry me, baby. We should have done it a long time ago, please —"

"Don't ask me," she said, and her voice broke with tears as she stood away from him. "It's too late — too damn late!"

He rose quickly, feeling a spurt of annoyance that just at the moment when he required sympathy the most, she should intrude her own needs; but his tenderness carried him to her and comforted her, so that in a little while she would again be able to resume her guard at the door against all his fears. He would never again feel safe without her. He held her to him, whispering to her out of their long intimacy together; and he was very patient with her because he did have this intuitive sense about people that told him what they could do best — for him.

4

The money Davy had requested from Margot came almost by return wire without any explanation for the delay. The next week's payment was prompt, and a few days later came a third telegram — DOUG AND I MARRIED THIS MORNING. HONEYMOON HAWAII. WILL WRITE. LOVE. MARGOT.

Davy held the paper gingerly because his hands were wet with the sweat of another summer. The July morning droned outside in looping waves of sound, rising and falling as automobiles thundered over the cobbled avenue in front of the barn. Davy put down his soldering iron and wiped his damp face with the back of his hand. His first impulse was to smile, but at almost the same moment he felt the hollowness of an indefinable sadness, as if he had just been told that he never again would see his sister.

But regret was foolish, he told himself; this marriage was what Margot had been wanting, what he himself had wished her to have. Yet not until now did he see that his wish for Margot's happiness had also assumed that such a marriage would take place only after he and Ken had already reached a point of success where the difference between Vollrath and themselves would not be as enormous as it was at this moment.

Without any softening preliminary, he handed the message to Ken. For the moment of stillness that Ken read it, summer again flooded into the shadowed workshop that had come to seem cavernous since all the others had gone.

"Well, at least she remembered to tell us," Ken said dryly, and crumpled the paper in his fist.

"Come on, Ken, be fair. With all she's got on her mind, she still kept sending us the money."

"She was just buying us off," Ken said. "The way you call a girl you no longer give a damn about just so she won't think you're a dog. All I ask is that Margot keep on sending us that money until we've paid off Brock. To hell with everything else."

"What are you sore about? I admit I feel funny too, but what right do we have? Did we expect her to invite us out there to the wedding? What did we expect?"

Ken shrugged and bent over his work again. "I stopped expecting anything from her a long time ago." He raised his eyes very soberly. "Listen, Davy; you, Margot and I were all in something together — the three of us just as close as you could ask. No other guy ever seemed to make any difference. But with Vollrath, all that came to an end. She walked out on us that long ago."

"She's still in it with us."

"And you're still kidding yourself." Ken tossed the crumpled ball of paper onto the table. "That's the end of our sister, boy, and remember that I'm the one who said it. 'WILL WRITE.' My eye!"

Davy called Vicky and told her the news. She was very excited.

"Davy," she said. "I've got a perfectly wonderful plan —"

Davy turned to Ken. "Vicky says we all ought to go out tonight and celebrate the wedding."

Ken made a sound of contempt.

"Oh, come on, Ken —"

"No."

"Listen —"

"I said *no!*" Ken's mouth was hard. "I can remember asking *you* to come along with Vicky and me when *we* used to go out together, and *you* used to get sore as hell. For Christ's sake, will you leave me alone?" He was shouting. "This is one night I want to be by myself!"

Davy watched his brother for a moment of sadness and then put his free hand over the mouthpiece because he wanted to spare Vicky.

"Instead of going out, let's work tonight," he said. Nothing in his voice showed how torn he felt. "I've got an idea."

"You made your date," Ken replied. "Keep it."

"I'd rather stick around with you," Davy insisted, and when Ken made no reply, nor even signified his refusal or assent, Davy knew the wisest thing to do.

"Hello, Vicky," he said. "It's a fine suggestion, but Ken and I are going to be working."

"Is that the way Ken wants it?" she asked slowly. "I could come down and work too."

"We'll only be kicking an idea around."

"I'll just type," she said. "I won't say anything."

"I'll call you tomorrow," he said, as if there were no hurt in her voice.

He hung up, hating his helplessness, to find that Ken hadn't moved.

"I was just trying to remember," Ken said slowly. "And I can't think of a time when I ever broke a date for you. Oh, hell, I'm sorry, Davy."

"Forget it. We've got this idea to play with."

"What idea?" Ken's skepticism was so wry that Davy laughed.

"We'll talk about the tube," he said. "There isn't anything else on our minds, is there?"

They made a gesture of celebrating the wedding by eating at the counter of a diner instead of cooking their own dinner. Davy kept wishing that Vicky would walk in and find them. He missed her. It was wrong to have allowed her to be pushed out that way.

"I might as well say it," Ken said at last. "I've had enough. We want to get wise to ourselves. If we don't find an answer in six months, then to hell with the whole thing! Six months, Davy, and then either we look for jobs or go in for aviation radio whole hog. There's too much dough floating around for us to live like this out of choice."

"How can you talk like that when we're so close to making it work?"

"Like hell we're close!"

"We've only got to figure out why the tube was so good for that one minute. I can swear that pumping is still the answer."

"Was that the big idea you were talking about?" Ken asked dryly.

"Don't laugh, Ken, think about it. We pumped out all the free air that was floating around, and the thin layer of air molecules that was bound to every inside surface. And yet, damn it, when the tube was sealed and operating for a while, it still acted as if there were air inside. There's only one place it can come from."

"The air can't be coming from outside. There isn't even a pin-point leak you can find."

"That's just my point. It must be molecular air bubbles that were trapped *inside* the glass and metal during manufacture when the stuff was molten. Maybe our operating temperatures are enough to make that trapped stuff burst through the solid surface the same way air bubbles rise in warmed water. We ought to be able to test it."

"All right," said Ken. "We can kick that around for a while, but my limit of six months still goes, Davy; I wasn't kidding."

When they arrived at the shop later, Davy heard the clatter of typing even before he opened the door. Vicky was sitting all alone at the machine in the office with the usual pile of paper on the table next to her. She neither paused nor looked up when they came in. Davy and Ken met each other's eyes and Ken was the first to turn away. He said nothing at all, but thoughtfully crossed to his own table, where he removed his hat and coat and got into his overalls. Davy went into the office.

For still another moment she said nothing, apparently engrossed in the copying.

"I came down because I felt like working," she said. Only then did she look at him directly. "Is it all right?"

"Sure," he said. "I'm glad you came after all."

Her eyes were quick with gratitude for his tone.

"Where did you eat?" she asked, wistfully.

"At the diner. I missed you."

"I missed you too. Both of you. I *did* feel left out, Davy!"

"I'm sorry, Vicky. You know I am."

"Oh, I know. Do you think Ken's angry because I came?"

"Angry? No. He's ashamed, I guess."

"Is there anything I could say to make it better?"

"It might only make it worse."

"Oh, there must be something!"

Ken came to the door. "I'm ready, Davy."

"Ken," said Vicky. "I —"

"Don't say anything, Vicky, will you? I just wish you'd had had the brains to come along with us in the first place."

"I just wish you had had the brains to ask me!"

He smiled crookedly. "Listen, if I had brains, I wouldn't be who I am."

She laughed, and everything was all right again. She turned to Davy. "No patent work tonight?"

"No," he said. "We're going to open the tube again."

She held up her hands in protest.

"I can't watch it. Every time you do it, my heart stands still. Go ahead but I'll type in here where I can't see you."

Glass was Ken's technique, and his movements had a craftsman's deftness. He took a triangular file and, with one swift motion, scratched a ring around the glass stem of the pumping tip of the tube. And then, with infinite care, made the break. The crucial moment of *hiss*, steam, *tock* when the clean line of cracking glass ran around the scratch mark on the stem and caught itself, was a moment of suspended breaths, for if the crack ran wild, the entire camera tube could be shattered.

But when the cut was clean, there was a sigh of air seeping in and the tube was open, ready to be sealed again to the pumping system.

Suddenly the clatter of typing broke out in a gust of staccato sound, and Davy realized that Vicky had been sitting inside, motionless all this time until she was sure the opening had been safely completed. He smiled inwardly, touched by her concern.

Then the heavy throb of air evacuation began — a dull pulling sound that could send a man into the instinctive panic of suffocation if he were too imaginative and saw himself within the small glass lung. When the pressure was down to almost one millionth of an atmosphere, the radio furnace was put into action. For one hour, heat was poured into the camera tube by conduction and radiation. The pres-

sure within the tube was now one ten-millionth of an atmosphere, and they had to make their measurement with the same method by which astronomers measure the intergalactic vacuum of outer space.

"Next step?" Ken asked.

"Close the camera tube off and connect up the electrodes as if the tube were in actual operation. At the end of an hour or so, we'll read the pressure again."

"And exactly what will we know?"

"Whatever we find at the end of an hour. Your six months has a way to go yet."

At the end of an hour and fifteen minutes, the pressure reading showed that air was once again in the tube — barely measurable, but present nevertheless, and yet no air had seeped in from the outside. The almost infinitesimal difference could be the borderline between clarity and uselessness.

"You win," Ken said. "More gas came back than could possibly have been left on the inner surfaces. Let's smack the heat into her for a whole day and see what happens."

"Hell, let's bake for a week," Davy said. "I'd rather do more than we need than less."

"Why not?" Ken agreed bitterly. "Time's the one thing we've got plenty of, baby."

He was wrong, however.

Never and nowhere in the universe is time the straight and endless tape that comes uncoiling from the small ticking engines carried about by men — the only beast of burden that wears a spur to rowel itself.

Out in the endless expanse of blackness, explosion and silence of space, time spirals and curves back on itself in patterns more convoluted than confusion itself. And in human lives as well, time is a flow that has rapids, eddies and even tributaries so that a man may live in more than one rhythm — one swift and turbulent, while another part of his life runs placid and slow. The pattern can be told only in retrospect. At any given moment, all he hears is the even ticking of moving cogs in his pocket engine so that each second seems deceptively to follow another with the same spring-tight precision of tiny toothed gears.

For almost half a year, to Davy and Ken, time seemed to have had a glassy stillness. But just as a river imperceptibly begins to flow faster long before the falls, so the course of their destinies was moving on to decisions that were being made for them elsewhere — in a government

office in Washington, in an engineering office on the eighteenth floor of a Chicago office building. The first indication, like a leaf's accelerated movement on the water's surface, was a communication from Charles Stewart, Attorney-at-Law, State Square Office Building, Capitol Square, Wickersham.

5

To his clients and to opposing counsel in the town of Wickersham, Charlie Stewart had a crisp, dry way of speaking; and even when his voice automatically slipped into his "cross-examinationer," the pouncing, brusque directness had the flick and disdain of a cultured man trying to draw sense from the congenital fool on the witness stand. However, when Charlie happened to meet one of his old classmates in practice in Chicago, Minneapolis, or even Milwaukee, he found himself speaking with exaggerated slowness. Even the word *ain't* came with a perverse ease to him in the trim surroundings of a metropolis.

"Well," he'd say, making it sound like *Wal*, "a feller lives a more independent life in a small town like Wickersham. We got our rich and our poor just like any place else—but our poor ain't so poor they step off the street for you; and the rich ain't so rich that you can't tell them to go to hell."

Every time he made that statement, he almost believed what he was saying, for when he was away from Wickersham he had the uneasy feeling that he had no control over his other self's loud voice and almost loutish manner. Or he would go to the other extreme and be stiff, cold and silent. He loved the excitement of trips alone to cities, and he would lie awake in inexpensive hotel rooms where the darkened ceiling, like his nerves, was a screen for lights that flickered crazily up from the stir of life in the invisible streets outside. He reached the point, though, where he no longer trusted himself to transact business so far from home.

At home, he knew his place and the truth about his place, except for one harmless dream which he permitted himself—that some day he would be governor of the state. At home, he never said or even thought that "the rich ain't so rich that you can't tell 'em to go to hell." One did business for Brock or, in matters that did not directly affect the banker, one did business with his permission.

No one except bank employees ever reported directly and daily

to Brock; but at least once every two weeks, one found the opportunity to run into him at the Club, or to drop into his office and discuss what was new in the world, and bring Brock up to date in a friendly manner on what had happened since the last such meeting.

Of course there were those in town who prided themselves on running their own lives, but sooner or later, each of these in turn made their trip downtown to ask the bank for a favor, and for their independence they had to wait a long, long time in full view of everyone while Mr. Brock took care of more pressing matters. No, Charlie Stewart would never tell Brock to go to hell because Charlie kept his nose clean and never tried to get above himself. He dressed in dark, factory-made suits like everyone else. He drove a black six-cylinder Buick sedan. He wore high-lace black shoes and heavy, long winter drawers. He had a nice practice and he got along. The first serious mistake he ever made was to agree to take on Davy Mallory and his brother as clients after they had broken with Brock.

As he explained again and again, volubly, at the Club, on the golf course, at the bank, and in his own office, he had no idea at the time what those two young sharpshooters had up their sleeves. Davy had asked him his price on some patent work and what the hell — First thing he knew, Davy swamped him with work, and, if he hadn't given his word, he would have mailed the whole mess right back. Christ, *you* can see how a thing like that could happen!

During the few weeks required to get the records into the form of patent applications, Charlie felt that his office had been invaded and taken over by two ruthless conspirators using him as a tool in their plans to seize the world. Davy and Ken planted themselves on either side of his desk and checked every word as it was set down. Davy in particular had developed an amazing grasp of the technicalities of patent practice, and for long stretches Charlie had to sit with pencil poised while Davy and Ken argued points of precise meaning across him. Their minds had the same lean swiftness that was now in their faces — as if they were hungry, sharp and driven. When the last form was finished they finally left him in peace — as if the conspirators had finished planting all the time-bombs the terrain could hide and were now sweeping off to some other focal point for their feverish collaboration.

Charlie explained the whole thing to Brock. He *had* given his word and they *were* meeting his weekly retainers. What else could he do? His thin, eyeglassed face put desperation into the explanation.

Brock simply shrugged because it was the banker's pride that he

never carried a grudge, but Charlie Stewart knew that Brock was consumed with rage at the Mallorys — especially Davy — for not having given in to him; and because he and Ken had gone ahead on their own with aviation orders from the Vollrath company, which managed somehow to stagger along after the financial explosion. Charlie was very unhappy about his clients. His manner to them was brusque and just short of offensive, as if he were continually hoping that Brock would drop in and see for himself how Charlie felt.

For a very short time, Charlie wavered when the local papers said that Margot Mallory had actually married Douglas Vollrath out in California. Even Brock's manner of referring to them softened a little; but the weeks went by and there was no sign that any of the Vollrath money was making a difference. Davy still dressed the same, ate the same, lived the same, worked the same, and so did Ken. The talk around town took its final tone from the way Ken refused even to acknowledge that such a marriage had taken place. People admired him for it, particularly those who had been laid off and those who had lost money in the stock.

Then, just when Charlie was getting used to the idea that his office was free of them, the whole damn business started all over again. He returned from a four-day trip upstate to find his door barricaded by a ten-inch pile of Manila envelopes from the Patent Office. He went to the telephone at once and got Davy.

"You better get down here," he said. "Most of the stuff has been sent back for amended action. Your original project is still alive and I see that two patents have actually been granted to you."

For a moment there was blank silence and Charlie wondered whether he had been cut off.

"Did you say that two out of that big last batch were actually granted?" Davy's voice sounded awed and far away.

"But don't ask me which ones they were; one is something about an oscillation circuit—I remember you saying that was Ken's idea—and this other one here . . . yes . . . it's called 'Parallel Circuit of Multielement Tubes as a Method of Monitoring the Synchronous Operation of Diverse Devices.' Does that mean anything to you?"

"No kidding!" said Davy faintly.

"What are you so surprised about?" Charlie demanded. "What was the point of using all my time and your money if you didn't expect to get just this sort of thing?"

But Davy's voice was very small and far removed from the receiver. The sharp conspirator, the agile hunter in the jungle of legal phraseology, was calling out like a star-struck boy —

"Ken, listen! We're real professional inventors — We finally made it!"

Yet, only one week later, Charlie acted as if he daren't interrupt the Mallorys with anything as trivial as a telephone call. He drove up unannounced and as he left his Buick and entered the workshop his manner was completely changed.

Davy was busy writing something in a ledger, and Ken was across the workshop absorbed in the awesome apparatus that must have included a furnace, because the place was unbearably hot. At first Davy did not hear the lawyer's entrance, but then he glanced up, and Charlie realized that this dark, gaunt young man was much older than the boy for whom he had once arranged a presentation with some faculty members.

"Sit down, Mr. Stewart. We still haven't had time to go over the patent application," Davy said.

"Well, after what I've got to tell you, maybe you'll make yourself find the time. First, let me ask you: Do you know a firm called the Electromatic Corporation?" Charlie took from his inside pocket the letter that had arrived that morning and glanced at the letterhead. "It's in Chicago."

"Yes," said Davy, looking at the lawyer with cautiously controlled curiosity. "They make a lot of electrical equipment for precision engineering control. Why?"

"They want to do business with you. I have an offer here from them for one of these new patents. They refer to your parallel-tube circuit."

"They want to *buy* it?" Davy half rose. At the other end of the shop, his brother turned.

"They offer thirty-five hundred dollars on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. What is it worth?"

Davy stared at him for a moment and then read the letter.

"Ken, come here and read this!" Davy called out, and then sat at the desk. After a few moments of scribbled calculations he said, "Forty-seven hundred right now, and we retain the unlimited right to use the circuit in our own work."

"Jesus," Ken breathed slowly. "Davy, this ought to be worth twenty thousand if it's worth a dime!"

Davy laughed. "How do you figure that?"

"It just sounds right. How did *you* get to forty-seven hundred?"

"I wrote down what we still owe Brock, added Mr. Stewart's fee and cash for several months' operation. I'm not putting this on any cost-plus-profit basis. I want a fast deal for what we need to keep going on our own work."

"That's crazy," Ken said excitedly. "That's no way to figure. Why, those people must *need* the damn thing, or else they're planning some development that depends on it. Let's hit them high, Davy. For all you know —"

"Ken's right," Stewart said. "A thing like this is impossible to say how much it's worth. The only people who have any idea are the men at Electromatic, and I don't even see how they can tell. If they offer thirty-five hundred, though, it's a safe bet they set the lowest figure."

"Look, get as much as you can," Davy replied impatiently. "I'm not putting any limit on the deal. But time now is more important than anything else. Five thousand dollars next week can mean more to us than a hundred thousand after two years of negotiation. This Westinghouse development has set a deadline for us, and we've got to be as fast as they are. We just can't forget that *that's* our baby over there," he said, pointing to the apparatus. "Whatever we get for whatever reason goes into that!"

Ken looked at Davy and then, after a moment, he suddenly grinned.

"You heard my brother, Mr. Stewart; that's our stand," he said, and now Charlie heard all the brusque dismissal that his own voice used to have, but the lawyer gave no sign of either resentment or acceptance. Not counting the original application, which was still in the process of development, there were twenty others still on file. If he could get ten thousand dollars for the Mallorys on this first one; and did at least as well with the others — there was two hundred thousand dollars' worth of business that these two boys might be doing, and that could easily be bottom figuring.

In a small town, nobody with any brains ever told anybody else with money or the possibility of money to go to hell. Not if he wanted to retain his small-town independence.

"I'll do my best," Charlie said; but behind his dry and impersonal manner, he was making ruthless calculations. The two young men were quiet too, but theirs was the silence of the stunned. When the lawyer walked out to his parked black sedan, he heard Davy break out into the wild incredulous laughter of unexpected victory; but he had observed him at work much too closely ever to be fooled again

by his boyishness. For the first time in twenty years, he had no intention of calling Brock as soon as he got back to the office. He'd wait and see first how things were going to turn out.

6

Everywhere else, the warm summer night was still, but within the small speeding roadster with the canvas top dropped back and the windshield pointed forward, a dark exhilarating gale tore at the riders. Davy and Ken, with Vicky squeezed between them, flew along the midnight highway at seventy miles an hour to no destination at all except the fulfillment of an intoxicating restlessness.

"Just name a place," Ken said. He gripped the wheel as if his fists were poised for fighting. "Name a place, and we'll go there! Otherwise, we'll ride forever!"

Laughter burst from Davy and Vicky, and tore away on the dark wind. Whatever any of them said had a wild humor so intense with gayety that it felt like desperation. They reveled in the excitement of the swerves and falls in the highway, the cruel force of the night air sluicing past them. They were as enraptured with this moment of their lives as if they were lovers who kiss until pain and then laugh with tenderness. Tonight was the moment that promised to mark the beginning of perpetual radiance.

Davy felt as if he and Ken had thrown an idea into the air, where it had burst into a thousand perfect replicas of itself to fall like dew all over the world that treated such ideas as treasures. Less than a few hundred miles across the continent's night to the east, one of the drop-lets had fallen, and right now — tonight, at this very moment — in a conference room twenty-two floors above the late theater traffic, a group of men were appraising its substance for its worth to them.

"Let's drive to Chicago and keep blowing the horn outside that office until they agree to pay you everything you ask!" said Vicky.

"And then to Hollywood," said Ken. "We'll buy a car a mile long and drive right through Margot's mansion."

"I still say we should have sent her a wire," said Vicky. "I'm serious. She'd appreciate it."

"So am I," said Ken, and the car hurtled through a dark tunnel of overhanging branches whose leaves flashed into the headlight vision like a whirling holocaust of green snow. "We'll smash right through

the house — ” his very intonation made vivid a palatial building in disruption, windows breaking, plaster and beams flying — “and come out the other side with Doug sitting on the engine like a radiator ornament! Hey, we need gas!”

“Try the Mallory garage,” Vicky said. “They have the most marvelous gas!”

“Those guys are out of business.” Ken paused as the tires screamed deliciously on the nerves. In the darkness, they looped around a cautiously driven Ford and glimpsed two pale surprised faces high in the old sedan. “Those Mallorys are rich and famous now. Anyhow, to hell with gas! This car runs on pure air!”

And, like drunkards, they all laughed again because at the moment the car seemed part of themselves, and they knew that they, at least, could run on forever.

Even when the roadster finally slowed up, they laughed. The sound of the sputtering engine seemed funny, and the last fitful lurches came with a farcical unexpectedness. The car rolled to a halt, and then the fragrant stillness of the night poured in on them a moist green scent and the whisper of insects. The headlong race was over and they had arrived safely at nowhere.

But Davy didn't care whether they moved or stood still here, they were living gloriously in Chicago. Across all that distance he could taste the admiration.

In a few minutes the yellow lights of the Ford came tottering along the road. Ken groaned and got out to ask for a lift to the nearest gas station. The old car stopped and the same white faces peered out with caution and dislike, but Ken's murmur gained him admittance to the high old black coach that stood shuddering at a halt. Finally Davy watched the Ford wallow away along the dark highway, with its red taillight a single bloodshot eye that finally fell asleep in the darkness.

The darkness was almost liquid in texture — soft, fragrant and mysteriously deep. Vicky leaned back so that her head rested on the top of the seat, and then drew Davy down beside her.

“Davy — Davy, darling,” she said, and it was simply a statement.

He murmured her name.

“I love you,” she said. “I love you so much!”

He moved his head slowly against her arm.

“Davy — ” She sounded as if she were about to ask a question from a dream, and he waited, but her voice died on her decision against the quick words that impulse had formed.

"Davy," she said again, in exactly the same tone she had used before. "What happens now?"

"Ken will come back with some gas."

"That wasn't what I meant."

"We'll go home," he said quietly, knowing that he was evading the question in her mind. "We'll go home and work. In a few days our new tube will be finished and, if we're lucky, we'll transmit a moving image."

"And *then*?" By now her persistence had a rueful irony.

"You mean if we succeed?"

"No, I don't mean that at all. You'll succeed. All right, tell me what happens *after* the test succeeds?"

"My God!" he sighed. He was completely the captive of his innermost thoughts now. "I don't know what I'd feel — whether I'd be so drunk with excitement that I'd go crazy, or whether I'd be just plain tired after a hard day's work." His eyes were wide open and intense even in the darkness, for he was his deepest self talking freely to the outside world. "If only it works! I don't really give a damn about the money involved, Vicky. Your grandfather once told me that there's an instinct — a drive — the way artists are supposed to have, only it's in everyone. When it makes you create something there must be such a burst of pure pleasure! Oh, what's the point of hoping? So many times we were absolutely sure the next try would be the one that made the difference. But, God, God, if it *should* pan out —"

"Yes?" she said quietly.

He laughed and shrugged against her. "We'd just keep on working, that's all. That's all that counts, isn't it?"

She was silent, and then her silence itself became a question.

"What's the matter, Vicky?"

"Nothing." She still hadn't stirred and her eyes remained closed. But then she, in her turn, became aware of the persistence of his troubled gaze and looked at him. Her eyes seemed very deep, as if she were willing to reveal to him everything in her soul. But even as he watched her, he saw the clarity change to reluctant withdrawal and her gaze became opaque. She said, "It's just that I still haven't actually asked the question that I started to."

"What is it?"

Her smile was slow and a little sad.

"I don't have to," she said softly. "You've already answered it."

Chapter Ten

For still another four days around the clock, Davy and Ken kept the camera tube in the enormous heat of the double furnace. Each impact of the searing heat allowed the point bubbles of trapped air to ooze atomic distances closer to the surface, then break through and flood their minute volumes throughout the vacuum interior of the glass envelope.

Every four hours, the furnace was turned off. When the tube cooled down to room temperature, the pumps too were stopped. In the sudden silence that came with the end of the throbbing, the pressure was measured. Then for two hours the tube itself was put into dummy operation, and a second pressure reading was taken. The difference in the readings at ordinary operating temperatures was noted, and once again the pumps began their beat and suck while the furnaces were turned on for another four-hour deluge of molten heat. Every day, all day long, the cycles were repeated, and Ken and Davy adjusted their sleeping time to the experiment.

As the differences in pressure readings grew less and less, Davy became positive that they were on the right track. Within the last twelve hours of the fourth day, it was safe to say that for all practical purposes the tube was outgassed.

It was late afternoon, but Davy knew the time only because of the oblique angle at which sunshine slanted into the workshop. He had lost all track of the days because the unit of time had fallen to the six-hour cycle of heating and measurement, and the data sheet showed that sixteen of these had passed. Both he and Ken were exhausted, pale and sober-eyed. Their faces were strained and their mouths looked old. They were stale with too many cigarettes, not enough food and sleep. They looked alike, and they felt alike because the single purpose of the work had fused them. Davy had only to glance at a workbench next to Ken for Ken to reach out for the adjusting wrench lying there among twenty other tools; and Ken had only to pat his pocket for Davy to throw him a cigarette.

Each one silently longed for an excuse to stop, yet an interruption would have angered them both. Davy called out the last pressure reading and then spread his hands.

"OK?" Ken asked, and Davy nodded.

The word and the answering gesture meant that the time had come to seal off the camera tube for the crucial test trial in the transmitting circuit.

It was seven o'clock before the radio furnace was dismantled and rearranged to form the original transmitting circuit.

Neither Ken nor Davy had eaten since ten o'clock that morning, and they would have gone right on if Vicky hadn't come in with a tin bucket of hot soup, a Thermos of coffee and a bag of sandwiches.

"This place smells just awful," she said. "Do you think that you too can live in a vacuum?"

"I explained to you a thousand times that a vacuum isn't lack of oxygen —" Davy started to explain but she interrupted him.

"Bad air is bad air," she said. "I don't care what you want to call it. I'm going to open a few windows here."

Half an hour later, they were crowded within the darkened receiving booth. The switches were thrown, and in thirty seconds all the voltages built up to operating levels. Very gradually then, the image of the cross appeared on the screen, growing in clarity and detail until it went beyond anything seen before. Then its detail fractured into a mosaic as if it had been embroidered in petit point. They watched the image for a full minute, and for that minute the cross retained its clarity, wavering only slightly, but never losing proportion. Vicky forgot the airlessness of the seven-foot cube that held them all.

Davy was the first to break away.

"Let's leave it for five minutes and see if any fog creeps back."

"We could take turns sitting here," Ken said. He didn't want to go out. "Then if the fog comes in, we'll know exactly when."

"Stay if you want," Davy replied. "But it doesn't matter *when* the fog comes back. What counts is — does it come at all?"

"I'd rather stay too," Vicky said.

Davy glanced from one to the other in the dim light that came from the tube screen. In all apparent innocence, they made their perfectly understandable request; yet apprehension seeped through him as if from some hidden infection. He could not count the times within

the past few months when he had left Vicky and Ken alone without a thought; yet this one time was as if he were more clear-sighted than ever before, as if he could see straight into their hearts, their minds, their most secret longings for each other.

All the warmth of the three-sided comradeship was gone as if it had never existed. And he saw now that it never had existed.

With the dreadful clarity came a thousand proofs; little gestures, glances, hidden lovers' quarrels like the night of Margot's marriage when Ken refused to allow Vicky to come along — everything could be made to point to their conspiracy. For even if they were themselves unaware of what they were doing, he, at least, perceived that what he had always dreaded had always been the truth. Now, in this brief flashing moment, he saw it all; and he hated himself for seeing it.

He left the booth, mistrusting his voice to make a too lighthearted dismissal or the opposite error of a begrudged warning. Out in the light and silence of the workshop, the banks of radio tubes in their precisely tiered array glowed in their unearthly life — invented by men but no part of them, each one possessing its own electrical function which it could perform for whatever brief forever was its destiny. At this moment, he felt most keenly their unresponsive inhumanity.

Davy stood separated from the two people he loved most by only a thin partition of wood, but more forcibly by a whispering that whatever he possessed himself rightfully belonged to his brother — to be surrendered without protest on Ken's casual demand.

He heard the low murmur of their voices and then a vague sound of bodily movement. Reason insisted that they were simply accommodating their positions; but this far stronger presentiment within him said that their murmurs had been the confession of persistent love and now they were in each other's arms.

Ken called out, his voice unmuffled by any kiss, although suspicion insisted this call was only dissimulation.

"Still no fog. How much time has passed?"

Davy glanced at his stop watch. "Three minutes. You can't expect to see any real change for some time."

The door to the booth opened and Vicky came out. He looked at her sharply, searching for signs. But a hand that had been clasped surreptitiously, a shoulder that had been touched with the intimation of intimacy, a smile of love that had been sought and then granted — none of these left any trace except in one's innermost privacy. For the instant that she stood by the closed door, covering her face with

her hands while her eyes grew accustomed to the light, she was wrapped in the baleful glow of possible treachery. She was everything false, deceptive and cruel; and even though she had given Davy her murmured endearments, everything that made up the surface of passion, behind that surface she had been pretending all along that he was someone else.

She rubbed her eyes at last like a sleepy child, and then laughed because she saw that he had been watching her all the time.

"It flickers so," she said. "And Ken kept adjusting the controls until I'm dizzy."

"You'll get used to it," he said, but behind his words he was pulling her to him, demanding, "Tell me the truth — do you love me?"

He glanced away from her for a moment and raised his voice slightly. "Ken, come on out. I want to try new positions for the arcs and see what we can get by reflected light."

Ken appeared, and Davy wished she were gone. She had spoiled a tie with Ken that was not only precious in itself but necessary to the work. Only by merging himself completely with Ken could exhaustion be exorcised.

The new positions were agreed upon and the arc lights were turned off to cool so that they could be moved.

"That ought to take ten minutes at least," Ken said. "I'm going outside for some air. I'll go for some cigarettes; that will give me something to do."

Davy merely nodded, but he was waiting for Vicky to say, "I'll go with you." He was positive she would say it, or something else that would be an excuse for Ken to invite her along. But the moments passed and Ken's footsteps crossed the outer threshold into the summer night, and Vicky had still said nothing. The silence spun out slowly.

"Why were you looking at me that way before?" she asked quietly. He held himself rigidly to the pretense of his task.

"What way?" he asked, looking at the switch in his hand.

"You know; you know very well."

"I don't."

"You looked as if you were hating me."

Now he had to look at her, but he said, "That's crazy."

"It *is* crazy. And I know what was in your mind. You were jealous because I stayed behind in the booth with Ken. You thought we were kissing."

"It's not funny."

"And I'm not laughing."

Before, she had shone with the aura which his jealousy had placed about her, but now she was even further beyond his reach.

"Every so often," she said, "that kind of craziness comes over you. I can feel it every time. It's as if you were suddenly turned into steel. I've thought about it and wondered why you, of all people, should feel that way about Ken, and I think I know the answer."

"Look, you don't have to try to take me apart."

"If you won't do it for yourself, somebody else has to. Something you once said sticks in my mind. How long are you going to keep paying Ken back for having saved your life that time you all ran away from the farm?"

He stood very still, but his lips were parted in an impulsive protest; he was appalled, even a little frightened, that she could be so hard.

"What a rotten way to put it!" he said bitterly.

"Why?" she demanded. "Is it anything against Ken? I know that there are plenty of things I do because of something I wanted as a kid. God knows how many other things I do that I don't know about."

"Why do you say it's nothing against Ken?" he said, very still as he watched her.

"Because it isn't; and because I know that you'd be angry if you thought this might be a criticism of him. More angry, as a matter of fact, than if we were talking about a failing of your own."

"I don't want to talk about it," he said abruptly. "And anyhow, you're wrong."

"You've just proved me right. You act as if Ken were better than you in everything you do—as if everything you had really belonged to him. You *act* that way, but you don't really believe it. Or at least part of you doesn't believe it. You're really two people—Ken's younger brother who worships him and Ken's older brother who knows all of Ken's faults."

"That makes me out to be quite a crowd of people."

"Two people can seem like a crowd if they're always fighting each other."

"I'm not fighting myself, if that's what you mean."

"But that's exactly what I do mean. It's the older brother in you that's in love with me—but the younger brother can't believe that I could ever stop being in love with Ken. Sooner or later you're go-

ing to have to decide which self you're going to be. You can't go on forever being half of one and half of the other."

Davy was silent.

"Even now," she went on, "I don't know whether the younger brother or the older one is listening to me — with each one feeling a different way so that you're being torn apart. But it's not easy for me either. Do you remember the other night when we were stuck in the car and I didn't ask you a certain question that was in my mind?"

"Yes, I remember," he said.

"What was the queerest thing about it?" she insisted quietly.

"I don't remember anything queer."

"You wouldn't, but I do. *You never asked me what the question was!* Even if we weren't what we are to each other, plain curiosity should have made you ask!"

"I figured that if you'd really wanted to tell me, you would have."

"No," she said, smiling with sad wisdom. "You didn't ask because you already *knew*. At least, the part of you that I love knew; the other Davy was so shocked and frightened at the idea of betraying Ken that he locked you up and wouldn't let you talk. Ah, Davy," she pleaded. "Be the Davy I love —"

"Stop it," he said abruptly. "Instead of working on me, why not ask yourself a few questions? What are *you* really getting at? You're telling me that you're tired of the way I really am; that the only person you can be in love with is the leader, the one who's always out in front. So don't blame me for not being what you'd like me to be. If you think you're sparing my pride, you're wasting your time. Why don't you come right out and say that I'm the wrong one? And I'm not trying to make *you* feel guilty either. The truth is that it's Ken — and it's always been Ken —"

The deep, silent, pitying compassion in her eyes burned his heart with shame, because along with the outburst had come the awareness that he no longer believed what he was saying. The pent-up rage had been released, and now the words were only a cloud behind which he wanted to crouch and hide from her. Her expression told him that there was no reason to hide and yet there he remained, with his hands over his face — looking like a fool in his own eyes, yet trusting to the love in the eyes that saw him for the understanding his lacerated heart needed so desperately.

In that moment of hot silence, Ken strode in, absorbed, noticing nothing; Davy saw that to Ken the few minutes had been only a pause in the long immersion in work — an instant of fresh air before the plunge back. To Davy, the same few minutes had been a cataclysmic experience that seemed to have broken his ties with even the immediate past. He felt as if the allegiance of a lifetime had been snatched away, to be replaced by some new citizenship in a frightening realm of confusion. Yet, until he reached a further understanding of himself, he would have to go on with the work at hand as if nothing at all had happened.

As the arc lights were being swung into the new positions, Davy went into the viewing booth for time to quiet the emotion that had been caught in full flight — a wild anger that was more than half shame because he could no longer hide from himself that Vicky had been speaking the truth.

He gazed blindly at the blank luminous screen as it darkened with shapes, and then his train of thought stopped, his breath caught. For that one instant he was nothing but a machine of surprise staring at the screen because the moving image of a human hand had come into view: a hand with the palm cupped slightly and the fingers outspread in a flashing gesture that was pure femininity. The hand on the screen turned, paused for a moment and then flashed from sight, leaving the round white emptiness before his eyes and a wild beating in his heart.

When he found his speech, he called out, "Vicky, what did you *do*?"
 "Nothing."

"But did you have your hand near the camera?"

"I only went like this," said her distant surprised voice; and an instant later the hand reappeared on the screen as if it had materialized from the magic of legends, larger than life, but poignantly familiar from the countless times those fingers had stroked his hair, caressed his face and touched his lips.

Her hand seemed to be reaching out to him with the deepest intimacy he had ever known. The intervening mechanisms were much more to him than mere wires, meshes, glass and metal. Her hand, by passing through them, had touched them, as if she had groped her way all by herself across the strange country that he loved. And be-

cause she was the first one to make that long tortuous journey after Ken and himself, she had entered the companionship of the pioneers.

His feeling for the unearthly land was a tie of many strands. He loved the way it had been created out of his own mind and then tamed, cultivated and subdued to exactly the use demanded of it. He loved the labor that had gone into it all; he loved the companionship of the other mind which had pioneered this new realm with him. Yet they had done much more than observe like diligent men; they had exercised the powers of the godhood by moving the dark mountains to more propitious positions; they had halted and even reversed miniature star-falls.

Out there, in that inhuman realm of electrical night beyond the screen, he and Ken had for three years been the only human beings, and now, within an instant, another hand had reached across to him through the infinite distances. So at this moment she was closer to him than ever before, and he was so moved that his throat was too tight for sound. As he watched the screen, his love was overwhelming because it was the momentary merging of all his loves.

"Can I take my hand away?" she called. "The arcs are burning."

He ran out of the booth, blinded by the abrupt end of darkness, and he put his hands on her shoulders with such love that she wore the face of amazement. Only a few moments before he had seemed to thrust her out of his life.

"I saw your hand!" he said. "My God, I saw it move!"

He reached out but she winced at his touch, for she had burned herself in the heat of the arcs. Then he touched her hand, holding it very tenderly because he was so suffused with feeling that he was unable to tell her what he felt.

3

At eleven o'clock there was a breakdown in one of the circuits, but they had enough data by then to know that they stood at a point ten times further advanced than ever before. Even with this enormous increase in sensitivity, no living thing could stand as much as a minute of the intense illumination that was necessary. For most of the tests, their moving object had been a steel ball suspended as a pendulum bob on the end of a piece of wire, but they *were* transmitting movement — even human movement, if only briefly

—and while a vast amount of work remained to be done, they could be sure at last that their dream was at the beginning of realization.

Davy insisted on walking Vicky home. As soon as he walked into the starlit dark outside the workshop door, the freshness of the summer night made him realize how exhausted he was.

"I'll go home by myself," Vicky insisted.

"Let's just sit on this step then and smoke a cigarette together," he begged. "Then you can go." She sank down beside him on the rough granite slab, holding her bandaged hand in her lap. She rested her head against his shoulder and he held her for a while, at peace with himself finally.

After a while, he spoke. "Vicky," he said slowly, "let's talk about getting married. It's high time."

She sat up and away from him. It took a moment for him to realize that during the entire silence which he had thought they were sharing, her mood and thoughts had been very different from his own.

"Davy," she said. She was speaking gently, but he could tell that a decision had already been made, and he dreaded now to hear it. "More than anything in the world, I'd want to live with you and be with you all the time —"

"Vicky —!" He made her name his plea to stop and not say what he was afraid to hear. The tenderness in his voice made her hesitate; but only for a moment.

"No," she said desperately. "You're just carried away with what happened tonight. Everything seems wonderful now, but you hated me only a few hours ago, Davy. I saw it and I was frightened."

"Maybe nobody can love all the time; and if they pretend they can, they're just lying."

"I never hated you," she said simply.

"Look, Vicky, you know me through and through. You said, though, that there are things in me you love and things you don't love. Vicky, believe me, I want to be only what you love; but I can't unless you're with me to tell me what it is."

"I never meant that I want to change you," she said swiftly.

"Vicky, we love each other, so what's the point of trying to make sense of it? I've been afraid of you. I've been jealous of you. I've been proud of you; and I've been crazy about you — There were even times when I thought it wouldn't make any difference if I never saw you again. So what does it come to — we've been married all along."

"Ah, Davy, I want to — so badly!"

"Then what's in your way? Take a chance."

She laughed. "Now you sound like Ken."

But Davy shook his head as he smiled. "This isn't the kind of chance Ken takes."

4

When he awoke the next morning, he sparkled with inner gaiety, as if he had been assured that from this point on the world would be forever pliable to his will. He moved about the kitchen preparing breakfast, and even the smallest details proved his new estate. Things seemed to leap to his hand — pots, eggs, spoons — as if he were a juggler of magical dexterity. When the coffee was ready, he went to the telephone before awakening Ken, and sent a wire to Margot: MOVING IMAGE TRANSMITTED. SUCCESS. MARRYING VICKY. LOVE. DAVY. Then, as soon as he hung up, the telephone rang in his hand — for this new magic which he possessed had made the instrument come vibrantly alive at his touch.

The magic had even touched Charlie Stewart, and the lawyer's dry voice held a warmth, a friendliness, Davy had never heard before.

"Well, I didn't do so badly for you two boys. Got you fifty-five hundred. Eight hundred more than you wanted and two thousand over their first offer. And it's not an outright sale but only an exclusive license. You retain all your rights."

Sitting in his own office, windows open on the morning green of Capitol Square, suffused with his small-town independence, Stewart was pleased with himself; and Davy sensed that the man was waiting for praise. On this morning of his godhood, benevolence came easily.

"That's wonderful, Mr. Stewart!"

"Hell, make it Charlie."

"Charlie —" Davy said and then laughed, and at the other end of the wire the lawyer laughed too, a little shyly and with a great deal of charm.

"I started out asking for twenty thousand, and when they didn't hang up on me I knew I hadn't made a mistake —"

"Twenty thousand?"

"Well, why sound cheap? But they do have a point, Davy. No one knows better than you that no patent is really valid until after it's

been upheld in court. A fight like that can cost an awful lot of money — and if the company should lose they'd be out what they paid you as well as their legal costs along with all of their profits. So I figured that since our major interest lies elsewhere, we ought to get as much as we can for the least responsibility."

"That's right," said Davy, surprised to find that Stewart was boring him. Davy could almost feel the weight of the lawyer clinging to the telephone, quite ready to settle down to a nice long gossip chat.

Davy thanked him again and made an excuse to hang up, but the smile on his lips remained. The world which had stood facing away for so long, not caring, oblivious, had now turned around so that everyone was looking at them, smiling with happiness for his and Ken's good fortune. His heart was full of happiness.

"Ken!" he shouted. "Ken!" And when he heard the answering rumble of sleepiness, he called, "We're getting our price — fifty-five hundred!"

"Wha — ?"

"For the parallel circuit — five and one half thousands of dollars!"

Before he had finished, Ken was standing in the doorway, his pajamas open and wrinkled. His hair was tousled and he looked like a small boy.

"Call Brock!" Ken said after a moment. "Tell him we're paying off in a lump and he can go to hell! Go ahead, call the bastard!"

"I'm going to call Vicky."

He reached for the receiver, but again the telephone was electrified by his touch and the bell jangled out their party call.

"Ken," he said. "Today we can't miss! There's money in this call. Watch!" He put the instrument to his ear. "Hello?"

The long-distance operator chanted that Mrs. Douglas Vollrath was calling from Milwaukee; then Margot was chattering with a happiness that made her radiant even from this distance. She was on her way to New York, she said, where Doug was going to join her in just a few days. Could Davy and Ken drive down and meet her before the plane left that afternoon? She was flying the airline all the way east.

"I just sent a wire to you not five minutes ago," Davy said, breaking in on her. "We've got wonderful news for you."

He told her, in a voice as rushed as her own, about the experiment, about Vicky, the patent sale, and then realized that this must be the

first that Ken had heard of any plans for his marriage. He turned and saw that Ken's face was expressionless.

"Is that really Margot?" Ken asked quietly. "Where is she?"

He took the telephone from Davy's hand and spoke to his sister with a polite and measured coldness.

"All right," Ken said at last, but he sounded as if he were making a formal business decision. "We'll leave here in half an hour and be there in time for lunch."

He went into the kitchen without meeting Davy's glance, with an air of having just betrayed some old promise to himself. Davy caught his soberness and silently got ready for the drive, pausing only long enough to call Vicky and tell her what had happened.

"We'll probably be back this evening," he said. "I'll be in touch with you then."

For most of the drive down, Ken had nothing to say. He sat at the wheel like a man of leather and metal—an ageless man with an ageless face.

"So you're getting married," he remarked at last. "Since when?"

"We were talking about it last night."

"When will it be?"

"We haven't decided."

"Have you decided anything?" the hard man asked. "Where you'd live, *on* what, and *with* what?"

"All we did was talk."

Then the silence came back for another fifty twisting miles of hot wind, roar and summer morning. A blue haze hung over the city and downtown traffic was shift, creep, stop and wait through the gas-blue air. Ken parked two blocks from the Belvedere, and only when he turned off the ignition and dropped the key into his pocket did he continue and end the brief conversation with the remark, "Well, let me know."

J

Davy had never realized just how handsome Margot was until he saw her in the lobby of the Hotel Belvedere. She came hurrying towards her brothers like a ripple in a silken flag. She wore a sleeveless beige dress, and a black straw hat of a weave so fine that the wheel of the brim was an almost transparent disc of

smoke, while the conical crown gave her face the quality of witchery. Her outstretched hands wore immaculate white gloves that extended to her elbows. She was so much one of those extremely rich people glimpsed only in brief moments of passage that she was out of place even here in the largest hotel of a mid-continent metropolis.

She held forth a gloved hand to each of her brothers. Her tanned, flowerlike face turned from one to the other, lavishly radiating her happiness for them to share.

"Gosh, it's so good to see you!" she said. "I felt so strange and temporary being without you. Davy, you're finally going to get married! And the experiment's a success. Are you hungry? I want to go out with you. Where should we go?"

Her little movements were restless, eager, and each little turn and gesture was made within an invisible aura of scent. The men she passed stood looking after her.

She took them to the high-ceilinged, oak-beamed dining room and sat herself between them, studying the menu for all three as if she were still responsible for seeing that they were properly fed.

"And for vegetables," she concluded, handing the menu back to the maître d'hôtel, "bring some spinach and carrots. Thank you." She laughed. "I'll bet neither of you have eaten any vegetables since I'm gone. Oh yes, before we go any further . . ." She opened her black patent-leather purse and started to hand a slip of gray paper to Davy, then, with apparent negligence, put it into Ken's fingers. She strapped her purse as Ken glanced at the check, but Davy saw that she was covertly watchful of Ken's reaction.

"Ten thousand dollars," Ken said slowly. "What's it all about?"

"It's for both of you," she said. "From me. Doug gave me an account to do what I want with. This is for you, and part of the rest is going for the clothes I've been dying to buy all my life."

Ken handed the check back to her. "We don't want it, Margot. Hell, Doug had his chance to invest by himself. We don't want his money slipped through a back door."

"In the first place, I intend to do exactly as I please with my own money. And in the second place he *does* want to be in on it."

"Like hell he does!"

"Well, you're wrong. He wasn't interested when you spoke to him. But he is now. He discovered that a San Francisco banking syndicate is backing a similar project —"

"What was that?" Davy asked sharply. "Similar to *what*?"

"To what you're doing. Don't ask me anything about it because I don't know. But I told him that you two must be way ahead of those people out there or else I'd have heard —"

"Jesus!" said Davy. "Don't you remember any details at all?"

"Only that their goal is the same as yours — nothing mechanical but all electronic. After all, you're going to have to expect a lot of imitators —"

"Just because they're not your brothers — Listen, Margot, there's no way to tell if they're imitators," Davy explained. "Not until we see who gets the first award from the Patent Office. And we haven't even had a chance to check on our latest Patent Office reply. We've already run into a fellow in the East working for Westinghouse on the same idea, but our methods are completely different. But this new outfit in California — It gives me the shivers. Christ, how many others can there be!"

"We'd better check on them," said Ken, without interest.

"You're foolish to worry," Margot said. "Besides, Doug is already finding out about them."

"He really is?" Davy said dubiously.

"I told you he was interested. Look, I have a wonderful idea. Doug was supposed to meet me in New York in ten days or two weeks. When were you planning to get married, Davy?"

"We haven't fixed the date."

"Then make it in two weeks. I can get back from New York by then. Doug can meet me there in Wickersham and we'll both be able to be at the wedding. Let's all be together for once at a wedding. And you'll be able to show Doug what you've got."

"One thing's got nothing to do with another," Davy said slowly. "If Doug — I might as well start calling him that — if Doug is interested in the project, let's talk about that. And of course, you'll be invited to whatever wedding we have. Incidentally, Ken, put that check in your pocket." He met his brother's glance with firm insistence. "We're accepting it with gratitude."

Very slowly, Ken folded the piece of paper and put it away without looking at his sister.

"Thank you, Margot," Ken said quietly.

"And you'll speak to Vicky?" Margot insisted to Davy.

"I'll ask her," Davy said. "But this outfit in San Francisco — What gets me is that it sounds well organized. How do you feel about it, Ken?"

Ken shook his head slowly. "I wasn't thinking about it," he said. "I wasn't thinking about anything at all."

Sitting next to Margot, he looked pale, pinched and tired. In the perfume of her presence, in the drenching flood of all the memories and aspirations evoked by her presence, the metal and leather of his armor had snapped and shattered to shreds and rotten fragments.

6

When they left Margot, Ken was so silent that Davy took the driver's seat. The early afternoon was hot with the full weight of summer. Davy got out of the city as quickly as possible. For a while, the road ran along the lake—a placid, unrippled blue that stretched for miles of coolness to the sun-hazed sand cliffs on the far side.

"Let's stop and take a swim," Davy said. "This sun is murder."

Ken looked straight ahead, his face unmoving, but his eyes alive with brooding. "Go ahead. I'll wait."

"You don't want to go in?"

"No," said Ken. Then he looked at his brother with profound reproach, as if he had suggested dancing by someone's deathbed. "Christ, *no!*" he burst out.

The hot drive continued and, while Davy drove, Ken's hands moved, one fist pounding slowly into the other palm in a regular rhythm of all the vehemence he could not utter. He was like a self-regulating machine that can be charged up to a fixed limit of tension and then discharges its power in single driving strokes. The build and beat of his anguish was so contagious that Davy felt his voice snap away.

"For God's sake, pull yourself together, Ken!"

"You drive, Davy," Ken said quietly. "And that's all."

At Mashekan, where the highway ran straight through the sun-baked center of town between two rows of automobile-sales garages, Ken touched Doug's arm and motioned him to turn into MacIntosh's. Still without a word, Ken got out and slammed the door in such a way that Davy thought he would be right back. The minutes stretched out interminably beneath the unshaded glare that was reflected in bright planes and glittering points from the train of bare plate-glass windows on either side of the shallow canyon of the street.

After a quarter of an hour, the front window of MacIntosh's

pivoted open, and Davy's premonition flowered at exactly the same moment that a sleek black-and-yellow torpedo-tailed Auburn speedster rolled out into the sunshine and down the ramp to the street with Ken at the wheel. Ken stopped the car abruptly athwart the sidewalk and sat staring at some private vision, while MacIntosh and a mechanic started to fasten temporary dealer plates above the bumpers. Ken turned and glanced at Davy. His eyes were still miserable, but now his lips were crooked with a grin that was both sardonic and sheepish. Davy slammed out of the car and walked over to the speedster.

"I noticed it on the way down," Ken said. "Only slightly used. Twenty-six hundred new. I got it for twenty-one." He shifted the gear uselessly only because within him was still that driving need for movement. "It makes Margot's money finally seem real," he said slowly, and then added, "To spend some of it this way takes the curse off it. It's all right with me now if you cash that check from her underwear allowance."

Instead of striking him, Davy walked briskly away and drove off with his hands shaking. Less than five minutes later, through the pouring heat of the afternoon, a curtain of dark sound began to lift behind him, higher and higher, until finally a black-and-yellow projectile streaked past him with a thick roar, a slapping blast of air and a glimpse of a white face. The very violence of the passage sucked out all the poison of Davy's rage. For an hour and a half, Davy drove home in a glacial isolation that was the loneliest feeling he had ever known.

Outside the barn, the new car still looked as if it were bearing its tail of dust to hell, but Davy strode past with only the briefest glance. Ken was sitting at the desk in the office, staring sightlessly at the two-week-old pile of Patent Office actions. He was holding the top sheaf of papers in his hand, but the first page was still unturned and the rectangular pattern of dust on the rest of the pile was still intact. Like a naughty child, he had posed himself in an attitude of application.

"We'd better get our patent stand straightened out before we go any further," he said quietly.

Davy was silent, but his heels sounded hard as he crossed the floor.

"I'm going to sell that damn car," Ken said, continuing in exactly the same tone as before. "It was a fool thing to do and we need the money."

Finally Davy looked down at him.

"Don't bother," he said after a while. "At least, it's out of your system and we can go ahead."

"It's not what I want," Ken said.

"You'll drive that car!" said Davy very slowly with such vibrant bitterness that his voice shook. "You'll drive it and when you're not driving it you'll wear it around your God-damned neck! Don't ever forget that car, boy, because that car is the difference between us!"

Davy turned away and changed into working clothes, sluicing his face and hands with cold water from the workshop sink. The gulf between him and Ken was like a deliberate rip in his flesh, so painful that it was difficult even to sit across the table from Ken and pretend to read. But there was pain on both sides of the wound, and from the corner of his eye Davy could see that Ken too was in torment.

"What are you punishing me for?" Ken finally burst out. "I said I'd sell it."

Davy didn't even look up at his brother's miserable face.

"Do as you please," said Davy quietly.

Ken pounded the table.

"You cold-blooded bastard!" he cried. "So I acted like a fool! Didn't you ever? You and Margot — the both of you — Christ, as cold as two fish! Will you tell me what I did that was so wrong?" He whirled up from the chair.

"What did you think was going to be done with that twenty-one hundred?"

"I said I'd sell it. *I said it over and over!*"

"But you bought it first! Twenty-one hundred dollars! After we've been going around without even a patch for the seat of our pants. We've got to pay off Brock, we've got to pay Charlie Stewart and a million old bills that we haven't even talked about before we can start thinking of anything new. And if you want to know," Davy cried, rising and pounding his chest, "there was talk of *me* getting married. What am *I* supposed to do? Set up housekeeping in that lousy torpedo of yours? There isn't even a rumble seat to keep the groceries in!"

"I'll sell it!" Ken shouted.

"And who else but you would buy a job like that?"

"Jesus, will you understand how I felt about that money? It was contaminated money. It had Vollrath's fingerprints all over it. Remember what a bang we got only last week when we found that we

were going to get some dough for our own work, and *how* we worked for it? And just out of her *spending* money, she can toss off to us a check for twice our own amount." Ken's strained voice dropped almost to a whisper. "When Margot sat there in those beautiful clothes handing me that money, I could have killed her. And myself. And you too—if you want to know. I had to throw some of it away—if only to take the curse off it!"

"Sit down," Davy said wearily. "It's over and done with. I've spent my whole life being a cushion for you. That's over. From now on you stand on your own two feet and sit on your own behind." He glanced at his brother for a moment longer than necessary in order to hide any sign that Ken was already forgiven, and that Davy's side of the wound was healed. He picked up the closely printed formal letter and started to read; but guilt told him that while he was free of his own burden of anger, Ken was still beset.

Davy's voice was gentle. "To hell with it. If you want to sell the car, do the best you can. If you'd like to keep it, then keep it. We'll get along."

"You're not sore any more?" Ken asked, after a moment's hesitation.

Davy laughed shakily. "Why don't you shut up, so we can work!"

Chapter Eleven

The hubbub of voices in laughter, shouts and protests—the clash of gears and cash registers, and the steady thrum of engines which is America at work, makes a transcontinental clamor that rises high in the air, floats east like the great sweep of weather, and coagulates into a single storm center over the city of Washington. There the tensions come teeming down on the austere façades of government buildings, and flood through the doors, almost drowning the clerks and overclerks within. The besieged bail manfully with pieces of paper that are initialed and passed from hand to hand to be put into the mail before five o'clock so that a countertorrent of official voices may flow back through the country to maintain the

deafening multimillion-sided national conversation; and so another day of uproar has passed in which America grew richer, buried its dead, began bravely the lives of the newborn, and oiled its ponderous machines for another spasm of making a living. In the eastern evening, the city of Washington begins to glow with incandescent monuments and feverishly prepares to govern the nation again tomorrow.

In the city of Washington, on the third floor of a dingy gray building called the United States Government Patent Office, there is an enormous room divided up into cubbyhole squares, with no sign that the sheaves of paper piled high on each examiner's desk describe the face and clangor of technological America as it will be in decades to come. Clerkly quiet was in the air now, yet the office was a court for screaming controversy and the fratricidal war between industrial enterprises. In each booth, a man sat at a desk; and for something less than two years, one of these examiners had been deadlocked in ruthless argument with the Mallorys—an argument in which no word was uttered aloud, no anger swirled, in which there was a perfect engagement of minds, and the point of the argument was the value or worthlessness of all the years the Mallorys had put into their work.

A thousand miles from Washington Davy could feel the stubborn resistance of the examiner's intelligence, even though he had no picture of the man's appearance. The examiner seemed simply a mind that worked behind the obscurity of a half-closed door; yet, as Davy read the long letter of rejection, he seemed to catch a glint of rimless glasses and a smile of satisfaction on thin lips as a telling point was made against the invention's originality.

The Mallorys themselves had started the conversation over eighteen months before by telling the examiner what they had built, why it worked and in what specific ways it was new and different from anything that anyone had ever made before. And they asked for an act of Congress that would grant them sole rights to build and vend what they had made—an act that would be called a patent.

The man in the cubicle had listened in silence and, thinking it over for some eight months, replied that the Mallorys were mistaken on several points. Moreover, the examiner reminded them, a man in 1917 had used a device very like one of the units of their complex system in a machine which had a completely different purpose; and another man in 1922 had used a circuit similar to one of theirs for a

similar purpose. For all the reasons listed above, claims 1-12 inclusive could not be allowed; and, since their application had only twelve claims, the examiner went on pedantically, the entire application was rejected, and the Patent Office would not ask the United States Congress for the law.

It was on the basis of that first office action that Davy had broken with Brock, but, as soon as the separation papers with the banker had been signed, Davy and Ken returned to the conversation with the man in the cubicle.

The man was told that he himself was the one in error, for he had completely missed the essential points in five of his arguments. The Mallorys repeated these points with detailed amplification. As for the cited anticipations, there were three reasons why the 1917 device could not possibly be substituted into their own invention to perform the same function as their own device did. The examiner was furnished with all three of these reasons. As for the 1922 anticipation, that, on close examination, was due to the examiner's erroneous concern with form rather than function. The Mallorys conceded that the diagrams for both might resemble each other on paper but that was due only to the convention for mechanical drawing. Electrically, there was no resemblance at all; and the two circuits were analyzed for the examiner's benefit. He was thereby petitioned to grant claims 1-12 inclusive and to inform the United States Congress of the rights of the matter.

This meticulous reply seemed to make the examiner more thoughtful, and for the rest of the winter and the entire spring of 1929, he waited. But his second rejection, which Davy was now studying, showed that he had waited neither because of bafflement nor because of press of other work, but simply for deadlier ammunition to come to hand. No patent may be cited against an applicant until that patent has been one year on the books; and during the examiner's period of waiting in his cubicle, four patents that could not have been cited in the first rejection now came to their maturity and these four patents he blandly presented to the Mallorys.

The citations against them were ingenious and, at first reading, conclusive. Scanning the letter, even the second time, Davy was overwhelmed by the finality and the justice of the rejection. Only on the fourth and fifth readings did he begin to see small flaws in the examiner's position — like tiny cracks in a monolithic structure.

There was no doubt of one fact, however, Davy saw; he and Ken

were not alone in their ambition. Other men around the country had been dreaming their same dream all along. These others had been working in the same anonymity, probably with the same rises and falls of personal fortune—with their own Bannermans, their own Brocks, perhaps even with their own Vollraths.

Two of the four schemes, as disclosed in the patents, were crude and impractical when compared with Davy's and Ken's, and were patentable only because of novelty. From his own experience, Davy was sure that these two existed only on paper and could never be made to work with any kind of efficiency: they were simply nuisances. However, the remaining two systems cited against them were as ingenious and as carefully worked out as their own. One of these was an improvement by Westinghouse over its own 1922 patent, and the fourth was absolutely new to the field. This last inventor's address was San Francisco, and the assignment was to a syndicate under the inventor's name—obviously the group Margot had spoken about. There was no doubt but that the man was brilliant, and the scope of his work indicated that he was being backed by ample resources.

Where Robinson Crusoe had been thunderstruck with fear when he had seen only Friday's footprint on the sand, the Mallorys were faced with two intruders in what they had assumed was their private domain, yet Davy was not at all frightened. He had more than half realized all along that something like this would happen. In addition, he felt a pleasurable strength of confirmation, for the presence of these other men proved to him that this was no crackpot venture; and the other inventions, in their present form, came nowhere near matching their own. Whatever doubts he had once had of his own ability were completely gone. Within himself, he seemed indestructible, no matter what he chose to do, and yet he found that he was wary.

"What do *you* think?" he asked Ken slowly.

"Hell, we'll beat them all!" Ken said, for he took the citations against them as a bitter challenge which he was savagely eager to meet. "If that's all the competition we're ever going to get, we're as good as elected right now."

Ken clasped his hands and looked at them with the hard satisfaction of vindication. "It's turning out just the way we always planned," he said reflectively. "Like a blueprint coming to life. And all the doubters, the wise guys, will read about us and weep. Like Vollrath. I *want* him for a partner now. Just to see how he'll act in the one show he'll never be able to run!"

"I wasn't thinking of people," Davy said slowly. "I was thinking of the invention itself. I say we're better — for the present. And that's about all."

"I hate that *thoughtful* look you get sometimes. It gives me the shivers."

"And I was thinking that I'm not at all sure we're going to go on being better."

"Oh, for God's sake, stop worrying!"

"All you have to do is *look* at those other patents and you can think of a million ways to improve on what they've got."

"That's their tough luck. Let them do their own work."

"You're missing the point: it *is* possible to think of ways to improve the other systems, *but it isn't possible to improve ours very much more.*"

For the first time, Ken had no answer.

"Take the Westinghouse system of scanning photoelectric dots on a sheet of mica. As soon as they make those dots smaller and closer together, they'll get pictures with fine definition and clarity. That's a chemist's job, and Westinghouse can afford to buy a thousand chemists to work on the problem. It's just a question of time."

Ken still said nothing, and Davy went on.

"Out in San Francisco, he moves the entire picture past a pin-point aperture that sees only a tiny part of the picture at a time. You yourself said that as soon as amplifying circuit technique improves, he'll be able to make his hole smaller and smaller and get a beautiful signal. But that's not our problem. The limit of our own clarity is the fineness of the mesh we use, and it's never going to get a hell of a lot finer than it is right now. The point I'm trying to make is that the basic difference between all three systems comes only from the kind of materials and mechanical techniques that are involved — factors *outside* the framework of the original idea. Sure, we're better than they are now, and we'll probably go on being better for the next five or ten years. After that, they'll be ahead of us and they'll stay there."

"You're giving us five or ten *years*?" Ken said, laughing with relief. "Did you ever stop to realize how much money can be made in five or ten years?"

Davy said nothing. He turned and walked away to the window.

"You think about it then," Ken went on. "Just think what you could do with a monopoly on a thing like this for five or ten years!"

"I'm wondering whether that's the point," Davy said at last.

Ken struck the table. "Quit that!" he commanded. "Here we are, right on top of everything we want. It's no time to start rocking the boat. You and I made an agreement to do a job and we're going to follow through. There's only one point to be made, and that's control of a billion-dollar industry. That's all we ever talked about."

"Was it?"

"Well, God almighty, what else?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out. The way I *feel*," Davy said grimly, "a billion dollars is just a lot of sound to me. I say it to myself and it doesn't seem to answer any need in me or even to call up any excitement. But if I ask myself, do I want to be in on the creation of a system that actually does what we always hoped it would, then I get a real thrill. So what if it doesn't turn out to follow the exact blueprint we laid out five years ago! So what if we don't have a monopoly on original ideas!" He laughed suddenly. "You know, you and I could get along on a hell of a lot less than a billion — or even a measly million."

"What are you getting at?" Ken asked slowly. His lips were compressed. "Why shouldn't we have our monopoly? Why shouldn't the blueprint be the one we laid out?" He rose. "Davy, God damn you, you've made a decision about something! *What are you getting at?*"

"How the hell do I know? I'm trying to think of the long run —"

"Stop it!" Ken shouted. His face was red with anger. "In the long run we'll all be dead!"

"Suppose we get our system patented, and get our five-year edge. Then tell me this, billionaire, what happens if television isn't commercially accepted within that time? Or suppose we get tied up in litigation? They're going to do it to us, all right. If a good infringement suit can hold us up until their laboratories get ahead of us, they'll slap it on and keep it on even if it costs them a million. What's a million when the prize is a billion?"

"Do you think I'd agree to take in Vollrath if he didn't have the money to fight our battles?"

"Right now, I don't give a damn about Vollrath!"

"It's time I found out what you *do* give a damn about."

"I told you — the way I *feel* about the work I'm going to be doing." Davy faced him. "And I'm ready right now to make a complete change in our procedure. From this minute on! We ought to push ahead to get our own patent, but any further work on the system ought to stop dead. Let's write it off to experience. What we ought to do is start

improving *their* systems faster than they can. You and I can do it, too! That way, we'd be developing one single system that we *know* will work right now and also have room for future improvement — "

"You're absolutely crazy!" Ken stormed. "You're junking everything, and for what? All we'd have is improvement patents. They'd still have the basic rights. We couldn't move a finger without their permission."

"And they couldn't move without ours. And we'd be working in the one way that would give us the greatest satisfaction. *Am* I so crazy? Ask yourself, what is it that makes you get up every single morning, come into the shop to drive yourself for fifteen hours a day — day after day? And you do it out of choice and so you must *like* doing it! Why?"

"Every time I turn a stopcock, every time I tune a dial, I know I'm getting closer and closer to something big — "

"All right, what is it?" Davy insisted.

Ken said very simply, "A lot of money — more money than I know what to do with."

"Like hell it is," Davy said. "Maybe that's what you think you believe, but it isn't true and I'll prove it to you. Suppose you made so much money that you could afford to buy everything you can think of and still not make a dent in the pile. Would *you* stop working?"

"I just happen to like this sort of work."

Davy slapped his fist in exasperation, and his voice was full of passion.

"Then we're right back where we started! *Why* do you like building something new — something that was never made before? What's the name of that big kick you get? Look at it straight, for once in your life, and forget the ads and the lousy success stories! What makes a tool feel right to your hand? *Why* do you like creating things? *What* is there about this work that makes you proud inside to be part of it? For God's sake, boy, look at yourself. What bang do you get out of being alive?"

"It's the money," Ken insisted in a dead voice. "Nothing else."

"Then why do *you* want money?" Davy demanded.

"Leave me alone, will you?" Ken said in torment. He made a motion of escape. "I listened to everything you said, and I don't want any part of it. We're going ahead with our work just as we planned."

"I'm talking about that billion dollars," Davy insisted. He caught Ken by the arm. "And you'll answer me. Why do you need it?"

Ken raised his head slowly.

"Because I'm lonesome, if you want to know," he said quietly. "Sure the work is fine. We're great guys—inventors, engineers, creators—but that's still not good enough for me. I need people, and there aren't any people in my life any more. Margot's gone and so are you. And don't tell me that you and I are living and working together now. We just happen to stand near each other—that's all." He fumbled a cigarette into his mouth. "Vicky walks into the place and suddenly there's no room for me. Not in your life and not in hers. When I get my money, I want to get far away from here. Away from you, away from where Margot was—" He stopped to control his voice, but he couldn't look at Davy any longer. Then he spoke over his shoulder and he sounded colder. "And there's another reason why you, of all people, can't talk about junking everything we've done. You're getting married and you're going to need money. You'll have kids. We can get our patent as long as we're better and we can make our killing fast. After that—who gives a damn! Keep going as we have been, and we'll wind up with everything we've always wanted. You, Margot and I—we were made for happy endings."

Davy stood motionless and he had nothing to say, for he saw that while he himself had been driving towards one truth, he had inadvertently forced Ken to face another. The silence between them was heavy.

An hour later a Postal Telegraph messenger arrived and asked Davy to sign for a telegram addressed to Mrs. Douglas Vollrath—c/o D & K Mallory.

Davy tore the envelope: ARRIVING THURSDAY. LOVE. DOUG.

"It's about time!" Ken said bitterly.

"And you really want to see him?"

"I want to see his money. We're going to need all the backing he can give to push this through fast. And by God, we're going to do it!"

Davy shook his head slowly. "You still haven't sold me a thing, Ken. Sooner or later, you'll have to answer my questions my way, or else that rock is going to fall on our heads and we won't have moved an inch to get out of the way!"

"And I say that we stand by our original plan. Everything's worked out for us so far. You're a great hand at taking long chances—take a chance on luck staying with us."

"No," said Davy. "I take only what *looks* like a long chance. To me they are always sure things. I'll argue with you as long as you like,

but right now you've got to agree with me on only one point — there'll be no terms or anything else discussed with Doug Vollrath until you and I work this out between us."

Ken said nothing, but while he had made no refusal, Davy sensed that neither was there any agreement.

2

Tiny heat cyclones stalked across the landing field as Vollrath circled Wickersham for a landing. From above, they looked like spinning blobs of jellied air. Even three thousand feet up, the turbulence was pretty bad.

There was no breeze at all, and so he came in from due west and thundered down past the plant. The ground was bumpy and grass-covered, almost as if it were slowly returning to pasture. No other planes were on the field, and he waited in vain for someone to come running out. The plant looked the same as when he had last seen it, but there couldn't have been more than a dozen cars parked in the lot that had once held over a hundred. He revved up the engine and taxied around towards the line of windows that looked out of the office. What the hell had happened to Mel Thorne? Why didn't somebody come out?

He saw a couple of office faces at the window staring out at him, but no sign of excitement. Thoroughly annoyed and angry, he cut his ignition and slid open the cockpit door. At the same moment, the plant door opened and Mel Thorne in shirt sleeves came out slowly, squinting against the sun.

"It's about time!" Doug said. "Everybody dead around here?"

Mel helped him chock the wheels, but it was no more than the courtesy that one aviator would extend to another.

"What the hell did you expect?" Mel asked. "Flags?"

Doug turned at the unusual tone. "What's eating you?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" Mel said slowly, staring at him. "I never would have believed it! You come breezing in here just as if your name up on that lousy sign there still meant something. Let me tell you, Mister, the only reason this is still called Vollrath Aviation is because this particular firm doesn't have enough money to buy paint to make a new sign."

"What happened to that army contract?" Doug demanded.

"What happened to *what* army contract?" said Mel.

"Stop it! It was being negotiated when I left. Everything looked fine. All you had to do was to carry through."

"*Everything* was being negotiated when you stepped out. But as soon as you pulled the plug, everything went down the hole. Why God damn it, the army never came near us after that! They made believe they never heard of us. Boy, when you lose interest in something, you make a job of it!"

Doug sighed, and glanced around. "Are the Mallorys here? They were supposed to come and pick me up." He looked at Mel again and laughed. "Aren't you even going to let me come into the office?"

Mel shrugged. "Come on," he said. "Wait inside then."

The plant seemed completely deserted. The lines of idle machinery almost obscured the single plane that was being assembled; and the voices of the few men working on it were unnaturally loud with echoes.

"The ship that's building over there could walk away from the Falcon if it ever got finished. I figured if I could fly it in the September race, I'd put us back in business again. But the ship will never get finished, so what's the use of talking."

They went into the office. Mel poured Doug a paper cup full of rye and another for himself. The cups had been used before. Mel drank his quickly and then refilled his cup.

"Another couple of weeks," Mel said, "and the sheriff will close us up. Incidentally, I'm the president now."

"I always intended you to be."

Mel smiled crookedly.

"President of a morgue like this?"

"It wasn't when I left. Don't blame me for this, Mel."

"Who else should I blame? Listen, there are ways and ways to sell out. Plenty of people would have bought you out over a period of time, without fuss. You would have had your dough. But dumping it on the open market was the one way to give us a black eye. And you were the only one with enough stock to do it. Why, Christ, people who owned a fraction of what you did, and cared even less about what we were trying to do here, were more careful. Everyone thinks you pulled a fast promotion and that you had planned this all along. I'm the only one who knows it wasn't that way at all."

"I'm glad to hear that, at least."

"Oh, I worked with you too long to believe you were like that." His

scarred face was sharp with sudden bitterness. "I know that you didn't know what in hell you were doing! I've been waiting a long time to tell you that. Anybody who's going to try to outguess you is going to get fooled because you don't ever have any plan to be outguessed. You just go off half-cocked in the nearest direction, and because you've got so much dough involved every time, anything you do is bound to get you more dough. You're not smart, and you're not dumb, you're just rich. Well, there it is. That's my speech."

Doug looked down at his half-empty cup.

"Well, I'm sorry, Mel. I suppose I should have tipped you off so you could have sold too."

"Jesus, you can be dumb! Four years ago when you picked me up in Bryant Square and I was talking about my idea for a plane, was I talking about the big money? I was talking about building the best plane I knew how. That was all. The big money was your idea."

"I'll buy your stock right now for thirty dollars a share. That's what I got for mine."

"The present quotation is thirty cents — asked, not bid. I'll sell it to you for that. If I sold out to you for thirty dollars a share, I couldn't face two hundred people in this town, most of whom I don't even know. Ah, to hell with it! You don't even know what I'm talking about." He finished his drink and poured himself another. "How's the movie business?"

"OK. Only I'm not in it any more."

Mel glanced up. "Did you finish the picture already?"

"They're only just starting it. But everything's in shape. I sold my end."

"Nice profit?" Mel asked gently.

Doug smiled. "Always."

"And what about Carl? Was he in the deal?"

"They'll find a place for him — I guess. They said they'd try. You know how those things are."

"I sure do! But suppose they don't?"

"You can drop that snotty tone, Mel. Nobody ever worked for me because they loved me. They worked because they got paid, and paid well. When the job's over, it's over."

"Except you don't deal in jobs. When you go after a man, you pick his brains and eat his heart, because you don't buy his labor, you buy his dream."

Doug's face was red, but still he smiled.

"Well, isn't that a good thing?"

"For you it is, but for nobody who gets mixed up with you. Well, here are your two brothers-in-law. Are they next on your list for the big ride? I hear they're ripe."

"You can't ever tell, Mel." Doug rose and walked towards the door. "Well, as I said, I'm sorry. I suppose I'd better ask permission to leave the bus on the field after all this."

"It's all right," said Mel, getting up stiffly. The drinks were beginning to tell on him. "Any time."

Doug still hesitated.

"Before I go, is there anything I can do? Reference? I wasn't kidding about that offer to buy at thirty dollars."

Mel ignored the outstretched hand. "No thanks. Wait a minute, there is something. One thing. Don't ever do anything for me, will you? Either good or bad. Just leave me alone — strictly alone. OK?"

For the first time, Doug looked at him with some discomfort.

"You sound afraid of me, Mel. I mean really afraid."

"I guess I am," said the man who wanted only to build the best planes he could. "You scare the hell out of me!"

3

The afternoon heat seemed to halt and hover just outside the windows of Doug Vollrath's house in Wickersham. Hazy wide breaths of air lifted the long curtains and let them fall to limpness. Ken and Davy had never been here before, and they sat with Doug by the big stone fireplace, where the granite slabs seemed to exude the only coolness left in the world, the coolness of un-lived-in houses. The caretaker had opened the place only that morning. Arthur had not yet arrived to put the house in order, for he was driving the new Duesenberg in from the Coast. The covers were still on the furniture, and the rugs were rolled away.

The three young men had come directly from the company field to await a wire or a call from Margot as soon as she reached Chicago, so that Doug would have time to fly down to Milwaukee and meet her there at the municipal airport.

For all the coolness, there was an aura of unasked questions and troubled thoughts. For one thing, Davy wondered what Mel Thorne had said to Doug while waiting. Every so often he would fall into a

frowning silence from which he would free himself with some irrelevant question to one of the brothers. The answers seemed to go unheard. The half attention was unsettling to Ken, for, in spite of his bitter argument with Davy the day before, he was unable to hide his true feelings for Vollrath. Instinctively he had withdrawn into his armor in his brother-in-law's presence. He sat stiffly in one of the white-draped armchairs as if disdaining to glance about him, while Davy, who was the most on guard, made no attempt to hide his pleasure at the spaciousness and comfort about him.

"Yes, it's a nice enough house," Doug was saying to Davy. "After I left, though, I began to wonder whether I had liked it only in comparison with the other places around Wickersham." He glanced around, shaking the ice in his highball. "But, coming back, I got a pleasant surprise. How about another drink?"

"No, thanks," Davy said. He held up his glass to show that it was still half full.

"How about you?" Doug had turned to Ken, and Davy saw that Ken's name was giving Doug the same trouble that Ken was having with his. Doug waited deliberately until Ken met his glance. "Another drink?"

"A short one," Ken said shortly.

"I'll make it."

Doug leaned over to the bottles, and splashed liquor into the glass which he handed to Ken.

"I suppose you two are anxious to hear about that West Coast outfit that Margot asked me to check on," Doug said. "Well, I had them investigated pretty thoroughly — the personalities, their backgrounds, their way of doing business in the past. Superficially, this West Coast bunch looks pretty good. Their money people are solid and conservative. The legal end is well handled so that their patent position is bound to be good —"

"We've found that out already," Davy said with a finality that was intended to put a stop to the conversation, but Doug picked him up at once.

"Then you've run into them?"

"But we'll have no trouble getting around them," Ken said. He spoke with a frowning insistence, as if he were determined to override his intense dislike and get down to business.

Doug hesitated, sensing a distinction, and decided for the present to ignore it.

"Exactly how good is that West Coast invention — technically?"

"Very good," Ken replied. "But ours is better."

"At the present time," Davy added quietly.

Doug glanced from one to the other, still searching for the veiled difference, but neither Ken nor Davy offered any amplification.

"Is that San Francisco crowd your only competition?" he asked.

"I'll have another drink," Davy said. "You're lucky no one walked off with this stuff while you were gone."

"There's still one more outfit," Ken said, "and that happens to be the biggest there is — Westinghouse."

Doug listened thoughtfully and frowned. He paid no attention to Davy's obvious distraction. "Well, that makes three different systems. Tell me this: can all three develop independently, or will one have to drive out the other two?"

"Why don't we talk about this at another time?" Davy said and rose impatiently. "Margot will be calling at any minute, and besides it's too damn hot to be talking business."

"We're not talking business — we're just filling in background," Ken retorted. He turned back to Doug. "I'll answer your question on how the three systems will work out. It's my opinion that a way can be found for all three to get along if everyone decides to accept a common type of signal. I might as well tell you, though, Davy feels that sooner or later one will push the other two out."

"By simple competition on the basis of performance, or by money pressure?"

Davy glanced angrily at his brother. Not so long ago, he would have accepted Ken's leadership unquestioningly, even if he had had to stifle his own inner reservations. Now he was burning with a sense of having been betrayed, but the discussion had gone too far for him to remain silent.

"It comes to this," he said. "From an engineering point of view, each of the three systems could be improved by adopting some features of the others. But if what happens in other industries is any criterion, it won't be a matter of the three syndicates sitting down pleasantly to pool patents and co-operate. Too much big money is being spent. The result has got to be that one syndicate absorbs the others after a long-drawn-out war. There's no way to tell in advance who will win: the one with the best patent position or the one with the most money."

"It'll be all or nothing, all right," Doug agreed. "But my God, the stakes are so big that the gamble is worth while. However, you're

wrong if you narrow down the question of winning to simply patents and money. There's another factor — the people involved. After all, any syndicate or corporation is made up of human beings, and up to a certain point of size, the company reflects the director's personality, his strengths and weaknesses. Take this Western group. I said *superficially* they look good, but my report indicates that their combination has certain flaws that I've learned to recognize, personal flaws, and unless there's some pretty severe clamping down by managerial authority, they're bound to end up in serious trouble. It's my guess that there will be no clamping down, and so in the long run they'll fold under pressure. At least, my intuition tells me they will."

"And how good is your intuition?" Davy asked.

Doug spread his hands. "It's the same one I've been using all along," he said simply. He turned the wrist watch over to see the face. "Margot ought to be approaching Chicago. Plus or minus fifteen minutes. Do you want to postpone the rest of this or do we go on talking until she calls?"

"Let's keep talking," Ken said.

"All right, then let's get to the point," said Doug. "Where do we stand with each other?"

"Suppose *you* tell us," Davy said.

"It all depends on the situation," Doug replied with a shrug that did not completely mask his caution. "I'll tell you right now: I'm very interested. But let's start with the facts. Who owns your company right now?"

"We do," Ken replied. "We've bought back every share there ever was in us. Of course, there's a ten per cent that goes to Bannerman, but that's a private arrangement."

"Bannerman?" Doug said as if he didn't recall the name. Davy felt the spur of antagonism because in only a few days Bannerman was as unimportant to him as Mel Thorne. "You mean *Carl* Bannerman? Well, that's a detail. As I see it, you're going to need the support and resources of a large corporation —"

"We're selling control to no one," Davy said sharply. "And you're right — this is not the time for such a discussion."

"You wouldn't be selling out," Doug told him. "You'd be merging your interests with a group that needs you as a hedge against the future. There's no reason why you couldn't keep your own identity within the framework of this merger."

"Specifically," said Ken.

"Specifically, I'm talking about a merger centering around the Stewart-Janney Radio Company. Their product has been selling well and their stock has gone from seventeen to fifty-four in the past three years. Last year they took over Dixon Radio Tube, and Morgan Radio. This year they're planning to absorb several small broadcasting networks and some big independent stations. Six months ago I was approached to see if I'd want any part of it. I didn't at the time. Now I might. I might if we — and I use the word *we* for the first time — can come to some agreement."

Ken's eyes consulted Davy's, but Davy once again withheld his counsel. Ken's face hardened at Davy's silent rebuke and turned stubbornly back to his brother-in-law.

"What kind of agreement?" he asked.

Doug thought for a moment and then impatiently shrugged off the question he himself had raised.

"Davy's right. Let's talk about it later — after Margot's here. I don't want to start any detailed discussion and then get interrupted in the middle. Jesus, we ought to be hearing from her any minute!" He looked at his watch once more. "She's probably trying to get us right now."

Ken sat back, unable to hide a sense of having been dismissed. For the moment, the two brothers and the brother-in-law were all isolated from each other — each one slightly bruised by the others. The hostility was fragile, but not evanescent. They had nothing in common but Margot.

The telephone rang at Davy's elbow and Doug nodded to him to answer it.

"For you," Davy said to Doug. "Long-distance from Hillside, Pennsylvania. Person-to-person."

"Hillside?" Doug said, laughing incredulously. "Who in Hillside PA could possibly be calling me? I'll bet it's Margot. What a place for her to get stranded," he said, rising. He was still smiling, but he was obviously annoyed, and everyone was silent as he took the instrument from Davy.

Doug listened to the message and then his face turned white — stunned with surprise and disbelief, as if the most incredible thing was that this was happening to him. To Davy, Doug's face was the most tragic and awe-struck he had ever seen, and then, as Davy caught the sense of Doug's halting, toneless questions, the same sickness that was in Doug's eyes began to well up in Davy's heart — an over-

whelming pain that was past bearing; and then he forgot to think how anyone looked—himself, Ken, or the heartbroken man at the telephone.

4

The same dead heat that lay on Wickersham had for more than a week extended all the way east across Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania steel towns, even the summer resorts in the Poconos. In Atlantic City, the boardwalk was jammed, and the ocean was as flat as glass. As far north as Ogunquit, they were saying that Maine had never seen a summer like this one. The heavy sultriness was spread all the way from Catalina to Bermuda. New York registered ninety-four without a breath of breeze. The two traffic-laned rivers and the ocean bay that bounded the narrow stone city sent up tons of steam that made everything clammy to the touch. For Margot, though, there had been no discomfort; she was far too deeply entranced with her first descent on New York to be aware of anything but radiance.

She had dreamed and yearned for this visit so long that she had been able to work out a thousand details of what probably was in store for her. She had anticipated the shops, the theaters, the hotels, speakeasies, even the Plaza, where she was now packing for her departure. She had been able to imagine in advance the sparkling smartness and glamour of a Fifth Avenue afternoon, but never once had she ever dreamed of New York as a city of tropical brilliance, and so, while the more jaded residents sweltered and faded, she had whirled crisply through the jeweled town that was the heart of the city. She was the Princess of the North visiting Baghdad.

She had come as Mrs. Douglas Vollrath; and Doug's friends had called to do her homage, prepared to be kind and protective even so far as to shield her from their own disdain—should they feel it. But she had long ago learned to dress correctly, and she said the right small things even though her heart quaked within her at each new arrival. In Hollywood, she had felt less a stranger than here because, while the people of the movie colony had been more famous, they were as rootless in California as they were in life.

The men and women who had escorted her around New York possessed an assurance and ease of manner that was brutal in the

way it demolished everyone who was not one of themselves, but by the same token, exquisitely complimentary to the stranger they might decide to accept. As it was, she had come and stood atop their first outer bastion in plain view of the kings and queens within, and so far none of the warriors within the shining citadel had shot at her.

Nor was she at all surprised at her reception, for deep in her heart was the singing conviction that from now on she could have anything in the world she might want. All her earliest dreams had been granted; and she, in turn, had fulfilled every promise she had ever made to herself and her brothers. She had the indomitable strength that comes with the justification of a lifetime quest. The world was a wild flower for her plucking.

She bought all the clothes and presents she wanted, and now, in the shaded heat of the suite, she awaited the limousine that would take her out to the airport. Doug had probably arrived in Wickersham by now and she would be there tomorrow if the air schedule held. The talk was that the big new air liners were simply marvels. She glanced at her jeweled watch and then, as if that mere indication of imperial displeasure had roused the court, her telephone rang to announce the waiting car.

Her luggage was left for the bellboy, and she took up only her new red purse — the one outrageous note in her ensemble. She carried it carelessly now, although last week, before her arrival and conquest, a red purse would have seemed impossible. But the man in Mark Cross's told her that the red purse had already made its appearance in Paris, and that within a short time vivid colors would be as commonplace as black, brown or beige. She decided that any purse costing ninety-five dollars couldn't possibly be sneered at so she bought it; and, because she owned it, she loved it. Hastily she transferred her money — over a thousand dollars in cash still unspent, her lipstick, compact, cigarettes, lighter, several crumpled articles that had — or once had promised — some use, and her one good-luck talisman: an old snapshot of herself and her brothers taken years before in front of the garage.

How young and how old-fashioned they all looked. She was in the center, laughing, with Ken by her side holding aloft a monkey wrench, and Davy — how serious Davy looked. In those days they had nothing but dreams — but what rich dreams, she thought now, for such poor

children! Well, all the dreams were coming true, and she and the boys were all going to get exactly what they had always wanted. She was so happy that she could have wept with the delicious frustration of being unable to shout aloud over and over "I'm happy! I'm happy!" and express even a fraction of the wild joy she felt. Again and again, she found herself saying, "I did it! I did it!"

She couldn't wait to start this soaring flight back to the fulfillment of every promise she had ever made to herself and her brothers. In Wickersham, she would alight with her arms full of the most precious gifts she could imagine, and most precious of all would be Doug's backing for their success — she who not too long ago had been kneeling on an attic bed, wearing her petticoat for a nightgown, whispering fiercely to two miserable, ragged boys in the darkness. "You just wait!" she used to promise. "Some day, I'll see that you get everything!"

"And I did!" she thought. "I did get them everything and more!"

As if to tease her with delay, a flurry of telephone calls from Doug's friends held her with good-bys; one after the other catching her as she was about to go through the door, until she answered the third one with laughter. The fourth call, though, was for Mr. Vollrath, and just as she was saying that Mr. Vollrath wasn't there, Carl Bannerman's voice broke in excitedly.

"I'll speak to her, Central. I'll speak to her. Hello, Margot?"

"Carl, I didn't know you were in New York."

"I'm not, for Christ's sakes. I'm out here. Where's the boss?"

"In Wickersham, waiting for me. Is anything wrong?"

"Are you kidding? Listen, *you* tell me: why did he do it?"

"Do what? Carl, I've got to hurry and make a plane."

"You didn't know he's sold out to Burley? Without a word to anybody. He didn't even say good-by. Listen, I report to work and there is no work any more. All I got was the arm. Jesus, didn't he make *any* arrangement about me?"

"I don't know, Carl."

"Well, he must have talked about it to you."

"I tell you he didn't. Any more than he told me about the stock sale. He must have just made up his mind to do something and picked up the phone and did it. I'm sorry, Carl. I'll talk to him."

"Will you, kid? I could always get along, I suppose, but I'd really like to stay out here." He sounded like a plaintive frightened man

talking with Carl's voice, and to Margot, it was a sad thing to hear. For the first time she thought of Carl as a man in his fifties as if the mere mention of his age were sufficient description.

The sadness stayed with her as she went down in the elevator, a sadness with something very much darker hidden away behind it. She was very thoughtful as she got into the car.

The limousine glided down Park Avenue, which was choked with traffic, then across the straight cross-town ravines that were open to the blue sky at either end as if the city were built on a plateau high in the air. There was a ferry ride with a briny sunlit smell, and then another ride along a spider-web highway that soared over miles and miles of Jersey flats until it sloped gently down to the Newark airfield.

All the way out, she kept telling herself that she was rich, that she was young, and that her entire life stretched straight before her through the windshield of the great black car. All about her, within casual reach, were the guarantees that misery would never touch her again, and she began to feel better.

The silvered trimotored plane with its corrugated sides was already waiting, and the sixteen passengers were aboard. With her precisionist's eye, Margot immediately recognized the sense of walking into a secret society whose members could identify each other by the invisible price tags and labels that each one wore. When the stewardess led her down the slanted aisle to her seat, she felt herself being carefully appraised.

With a small inner smile, she suddenly realized that she was more than fulfilling the old cherished daydream of traveling with all the trappings of luxury — not as an excursionist but as a matter of right — in continuation of that still-remembered Pullman ride with her parents. For years, that vision had been the embodiment of all her yearnings — and even that was coming true with far greater elegance than she had ever imagined, because the great plane and its temporary club of passengers was far more romantically real in its implication of exclusiveness than any train.

The door finally closed and the big Fokker-Ford rose circling into the air so that the haze of Manhattan appeared once more and then fell behind as the plane wheeled westward into the joyous afternoon. She made herself comfortable, admiring the great plane, wishing that Doug were the man who had built it. That is what he really ought to do, she told herself as a reminder for some future casual suggestion to him. This is the true future of aviation, she would say, not flashy

speed planes for the army. And it would make up to Mel Thorne for a lot.

An hour out of Philadelphia, the plane suddenly shuddered as the port engine belched a clot of blue flame; the passengers braced themselves for catastrophe, but the engine resumed its thrumming roar. Everyone sat back, some exchanging glances, while others, pretending to be veterans, glanced at no one at all.

She settled back again to her inner reflections, but they were no longer there. They had suddenly assumed a very different shape, as if the momentary fright had jolted away the temporary well-being, leaving behind only the darkness that had battered on her with Carl Bannerman's telephone call. She felt tense and impatient.

The idea of a new aviation business for Doug returned, but with quite another meaning. It was imperative to divert his interest into something like that just as soon as he would agree to finance her brothers. Then she herself would insist on taking over that part of his interests. It was a natural arrangement, she would argue; she and her brothers had always been very close, and she *was* a sound business woman. Doug would have aviation, which after all was his deepest interest —

There, the train of thought stopped abruptly, overtaken and thrust behind by a more swiftly racing torrent of dread at the possibility that, at this very moment, Doug might have come face to face with Davy and Ken without her intervening presence. There was bound to be a clash.

Then even that impatience exploded before the force of a still more profound admission: Doug could be very dangerous for her brothers. Sooner or later, he would treat them exactly as he had treated Mel Thorn and Carl Bannerman. There was no way to stop him, nor was there any way to anticipate him. She was face to face at last with the one truth she had successfully evaded for years: Doug was an exceptionally dangerous man.

Her alarm grew still sharper until it was panic for having been so intent on trying to fulfill her old promise to her brothers that she had deliberately blinded herself to the price that Doug would demand of them. None of this lessened her love for Doug because she was too committed to him, faults and all; she even permitted herself to believe that after a few years with herself as the intermediary agent, the three men might eventually be able to work together. Neither Ken nor Davy could be as easily crushed as Carl and Mel, but there was no use in

her telling herself that they could stand up to Doug once his massive devouring interest started rolling like a juggernaut on the wheels of his power. No one had ever resisted him successfully. No one, she thought, and her panic deepened.

At this very moment, an argument might have broken out between the three waiting men if Doug had arrived in Wickersham early enough. She could even hear their bitter voices, the biting recriminations, the contempt, the angry denunciations. Hurry, she whispered to the pilot hidden from her view. For God's sake, hurry! And the plane slid down an invisible spiral ramp in the sky to the outskirts of the earthbound thundercloud that was Pittsburgh.

In her agitation, she left the plane for the time it was on the ground. She was tempted to hunt for a telephone in order to call Wickersham but then she discarded the idea for fear of missing the flight. She was the first to re-enter on the pilot's signal for departure.

Twenty minutes west of Pittsburgh, the port engine shouted again as it had done before, settled down — deceptively, for it blasted fire three times in quick succession. Finally, in a split second that seemed as long as eternity, the engine fell away from the wing altogether with dreamlike slowness, leaving the great spar transformed into ragged sheets of yellow flame. The plane turned over and away from the lost engine and flew for a moment on its side, so that Margot slid from her seat into the aisle, thinking only that her dress would be ruined. The aircraft then nosed forward and dove downward so that the jumble of passengers slid down the chute between the seats and piled up against the hatch door to the captain's cockpit.

Dimly she thought, how funny we must all look. She was on the top of the soft squirming mass, with her purse still clutched in her hand. She caught a glimpse of cloud racing past the porthole, as if she were in an elevator plummeting groundward from the sky —

With an oddly impersonal clarity she could discern the beginnings of regret, an actual ache in her stomach — a pain still very mild, but which was already growing into the most numbing sadness she would ever know. It seemed inconceivable, but brutally true, that within the next few seconds she would probably die. She couldn't move because the sensation of free fall was paralyzing, and for the first time she realized that her ears were ringing with shrieks, tears and curses. Thank God, she thought, there were no children aboard to go through this; and then she lost patience with everyone imprisoned beneath her. Be quiet, she wanted to shout, we're all in the same fix. Nobody will

walk away from this! She was suddenly blind with tears because she didn't want to die. Oh God, it was going to hurt so! Poor Ken — poor, poor Ken!

The farmer stood transfixed as he watched the falling silver torch, and he thought at first that the crash would come in his north cornfield. God damn this drought — everything would go up in flames, the work of a whole damn year and all the savings from years before all in one puff of heat like a piece of newspaper yellowed from years in the hot attic. But at least he could sue the company. For everything they had, those corporation bastards!

The smash, when it came, was even louder than he had expected, but what made it particularly bad was the sound of things breaking on a gigantic scale. He stood there numbed, waiting to see his dry corn go up and spread into a marching curtain of flame. But the crash must have taken place further away than he had anticipated, probably up in the hills. Thank God for that at least — and then he sensed suddenly that he was bitterly disappointed. All his life, he realized, he had been waiting and wishing for some awesome catastrophe to break about him so that all his failures, mistakes, boredom and flurries of wretchedness would be scorched away and he along with it. God damn it, he said over and over, only dimly aware that he was running tearfully for the farmhouse telephone.

J

For the entire first day after the news of the crash, Davy was like an uneasy sleeper in some strange darkness, not sure whether he was fitfully waking himself from a persistent nightmare or whether he was continually escaping into thin sleep from the memory of a dread sentence passed upon him that afternoon. Only the horror of loss had reality.

That day was torture, too, because it was shot through with the wild hope that the very next moment would bring a telephone call saying that the accident had never happened and that Margot was alive, still laughing, still lovely, still as vivid as she had been when he had last seen her.

He was bewildered; shattered. Up until this point of his life, within his own experience, he had always had the sense that there were no

limits to what he could achieve, and the soaring mood of success which had grown out of the final phase of the experiment had given him the conviction that life was going to go on like that forever. The disagreement with Ken had been only a difference of opinion on the best and surest road to the sort of life that would be theirs anyhow, attaining higher and higher crescendos with everyone remaining always young, always beautiful, always full of hope. Now, for the first time, he had been suddenly thrust into plain view of the horizon that awaited all of them and everything they might achieve.

There was no pattern to be found in Margot's death: it proved nothing, nothing was gained, nothing was paid for, nothing was learned—the death was meaningless in any other terms than the event itself. There was only one tangible fact—death awaited them all ultimately; there *was* going to be an end.

As bad as it was for Davy, he knew that the waiting for Margot's body to arrive must be an unrelieved blackness for Ken, who dragged himself through the pretense of work like a stunned creature. All that morning Davy had invented tasks to give Ken the illusion of usefulness, but sooner or later, Ken's fingers would stop moving as he sat and stared emptily across the room, his face drawn and set.

Davy accomplished little more, for work seemed unimportant, though he knew that he possessed something Ken lacked—after the funeral a life still was waiting for him. Vicky spent the night with them, and for the first time Davy could watch her touch his brother, talk to him, hold his hand and sit by his side without the jealousy that had always made him ashamed.

"I was never this close to you before," Davy told her that afternoon when Ken was sleeping on the couch. Davy sat facing her across the paper-littered table, and he put his hand out to cover hers. "Even this," he said quietly, pressing her fingers. "This feels closer than anything else we've ever done together. I used to tell myself that you didn't fall in love with me when I was most in love with you; and that when you finally did, I was a different person. It seemed to me that we were out of step. I expected to be out of step with you forever—"

"That wasn't a happy way to be in love," she said.

"I was prepared not to be happy," he said. "I would have had you on any terms at all. But now it's just as if we both had fallen in love together at the very same time."

The next day he and Ken met Vollrath at the undertaker's. There could be no question of any services at Vollrath's house, and it was

decided to have them in church. That is, Davy and Doug made the decision. Ken had nothing to say. Doug's wish to consult with them was a formality, a gesture of proffered friendship that Vollrath did not know exactly how to put into words; for that reason the meeting was a trial for Davy, who was uncomfortably aware that Vollrath seemed to be struggling with some unspoken plea. Leaving him at the door was almost the same as turning away in the midst of a conversation. Davy asked him to return with them to the workshop to sit around for a while, and Vollrath's expression brightened; then he rather stiffly refused, as if obeying an inner command from an authority he had come to hate.

That night Ken burst out of his torpor of grief with violence. He had been leafing slowly through a sheaf of patent analyses drawn up by Davy when he suddenly slammed his hand down on the pile of papers and rose to his feet, his face a torment of desperation.

"What's the use!" he cried out. "What's the use of planning or hoping when nothing works out, or whatever you hope for comes in a way you hate? You never give up the dream that if the plan is big enough or the wish wild enough you won't be cheated. But every God-damn time you fall flat on your face and it's as funny as a two reel comedy! You, me, Vollrath, Margot — we're all to be laughed at! And of all the jokes, you and I are the funniest!"

"Why?"

"Because there's no point to anything we do or think. Even the very methods we've been taught are plain lies. We're supposed to solve everything by planning, by testing every step before we go on to the next. But nothing in life works that way. Everything is haphazard, an accident — a good break or a bad one. Nobody's in control. We think we're building something — but what the hell does it all amount to? And if we should ever finish, it'll only be because we *say* we've finished. Because nothing is ever finished until it collapses and is thrown away. That's the way it is in life — a long jump into nothing with a stupid happy grin on your face as you fall because you think you're really going someplace. And how long does the jump last? Only a fraction of a second and then it's all over — stupid grin and all."

"Listen, Ken, in a few weeks, a few months, we'll —"

"Pull ourselves together?" Ken asked, looking up bitterly. "You're kidding yourself all over again. What you really mean is that in a little while we'll be able to forget the lousy truth as we're seeing it now."

We'll be able to go back to the dream so that we can go on falling in comfort. But the way we see it now is the way it really is, and the way it always will be whether we like it or not. Only this very second counts for human beings in this life; and anybody who doesn't make the most of it is a fool!"

"Don't talk that way," Davy said sharply.

"You feel the same as I do, Davy, only you're afraid to admit it. God, you can't help but feel the same."

"It's only panic, Ken," Davy insisted. "Look, I agree that we are all sensation and appetites, but you're leaving out something just as important — the terrific thrill of *making* something, whether it's an idea, a new machine, a house, a dress, or a seed grow in the ground, but making whatever it is exactly the way *you* think it should be made. And if that's left out of people's lives, something is missing even if they don't know exactly what it is. The old man told me that once and I believe it now because I actually *feel* it. And you do, too."

"You're not getting the point," Ken said in agony. "What's killing me is that there doesn't seem time to work hard enough or fast enough. Jesus, my hands are just aching," he burst out. "I feel as if my head keeps turning this way and that way, seeing all the things left to be done. And there'll never be enough time. Never!"

"There will be!"

"There won't be," Ken insisted in despair. "What you were talking about the other day — the long view. Do you realize how funny that sounds now?"

"But it's the right idea, Ken. It still is."

"For a thinking machine, it is," Ken retorted. "For somebody that's all brain and no feeling and no emotion. But never for human beings. I'm telling you this, and I'm laying it out as flat as I can, I'll never be able to go along with that. We'll never live long enough to get the satisfaction that goes with it. If you still insist on junking everything so that we have to start all over, let's split up right now. But I'm warning you, Davy, I'm seeing things more clearly now than you. Let's stick to our original gamble. The odds against us are tougher than we figured. Well, we can change the odds by taking in Vollrath. That San Francisco crowd won't even stand a chance. You want to see a combining of ideas? All right, let the others come to *us* and *we'll* do the combining. We can make them. We can get ourselves a lab staff so big nobody will ever be able to catch up!"

"And you really think we can work with Vollrath?"

"Why not? We worked with Carl Bannerman and we worked with Brock —"

"And we eventually threw them both over. Vollrath's worked with Mel Thorne and Carl Bannerman, and turned them into dummies. I'm afraid of Doug, Ken. We never met anybody as tough as he is."

"And he never met anybody like us either. Davy," he pleaded, "come along with me, kid! Don't hold back!"

"Ken, you're wrong."

"There's no conviction in your voice. You're just saying words you don't believe."

"Only because of Margot."

"Just *because* of Margot — I'm finally sure I'm right!"

Davy rose with a twist of escape. "This isn't the time to talk about it."

"It is," Ken insisted, taking his arm to press the advantage. "Now, before there's a chance to start kidding ourselves all over again. *Now*. You frighten me the way you hold back!"

"I'm not holding back — we'll be together no matter what happens."

"When we were kids running away from the farm that night, Davy, I lost you for a few minutes in the woods. Then I heard the splashing in the pool and I almost died because something told me you weren't going to be able to get out by yourself —"

"What makes you think I'd ever forget it?" Davy asked slowly. His heart hammered a slow ponderous beat that threatened to smother him — as if the deepest, most secret nerve in his heart were being pressed upon.

"Davy, what scared me before I got to you was the fear that I was going to be left all alone." Ken paused, clenching his fists, and then shouted, "Don't ever make me feel that way again!"

Davy slowly sat down at the desk, clasping and unclasping his hands. Bitterness was a drag and he himself didn't know his own voice — dead and colorless. "All right, Ken, we'll do it your way."

The casket arrived on the midnight train, and Davy was there to meet it with Doug and Ken. The moment that the long shining box was lifted down from the baggage car, the death of Margot became so real to Davy that now there was no way he could turn his head to hide from it. A few newspaper photographers flashed bulbs in the hot and sticky night. Vicky stood by his side, holding his hand in hers, and even while he stood with bowed head he needed her passionately as the affirmation of living.

The hearse received the casket; Doug told them that the funeral services were set for eleven o'clock the following morning, and then left. Davy and Vicky rode home with Ken sitting between them, numb with exhaustion. Ken fell into bed at once, and in less than a minute he was asleep as if he were unconscious. Davy returned to the darkened office, where faintly he could see Vicky sitting on the couch.

He went on his knees beside her and put his face in her lap.

"I'll stay with you all night," she said, stroking his head.

The next morning, in the Church of St. James, where Davy and Vicky were to have been married, and on the same day, funeral services were held for Margot. The ceremony was being postponed ten minutes, with Doug's permission, to allow the governor to be present. Many of Doug's friends from New York had wired that they were coming out and the 10:48 from Chicago was also a few minutes late. The vestry room had been set aside for the privacy of the immediate family.

The catastrophe, three days past now, was still referred to in the newspapers as a national calamity, and overnight Doug had been forgiven. The note of high tragedy had been maintained in Wickersham on such a level that, conspicuous among the throng of total strangers already in the pews, were a dozen political figures carefully selected at special meetings of both major parties as a mark of respect to one of the state's leading citizens. Doug had publicly established his citizenship in the state by his insistence that Margot be buried there, even though the true meaning of Doug's gesture, as Davy sensed it, was a stubborn will to salvage at least a minor victory from death by having Margot complete the journey on which she had started.

Even here in the half-shaded room, Doug alone of the four young people was the one with the carriage of command. Norton Wallis was present because Davy had asked him. He sat holding Vicky's hand, but he kept himself aloof. In the wait before the service, a few well-meaning intruders came in to shake Doug's hand and murmur inarticulate condolences. He introduced Davy and Ken, sometimes as his brothers-in-law, or as Margot's brothers, and very often — without any self-consciousness — simply as *his* brothers. To himself he probably seemed all controlled dignity, but the eyes in his impassive face were those of a shocked child, and his courteous acknowledgments had a trancelike quality. Looking about, Davy wondered at how young the others appeared — like frightened children dressed up in their elder's dark clothes.

Total strangers streamed past the half-opened door into the pews.

They had fixed owlsh faces, and they walked with a hushed tread and solemn murmurs. A few seemed familiar to Davy — some of the girls from the New York Store with whom Margot had worked, and even some of the young men from Page Park, now dressed in stiff collars and dark suits.

From the parade, a sudden swirl of repressed excitement, pale color and exotic smartness burst into the vestry room as the Eastern friends arrived. They pressed Doug's hands with an intensity that was almost theatrical in contrast to the decorum of the people in the hall. Davy, Ken and Vicky were thrust aside while Doug remained as the sole host: the solitary mourner. Even before he could introduce them, the undertaker's assistant whispered that the governor had arrived and was seated in the fourth pew on the right. Doug nodded. The strange friends withdrew and he turned to the rest of the immediate family, but they had withdrawn from him and were once more a family to themselves.

All the way out to the cemetery, the four young people rode in complete silence. Norton Wallis had excused himself from going. The burial service was extremely brief and Ken's dazed eyes wept no tears, nor did his frozen, old-man's expression ever change. The day was hot, and the earth, freshly turned that morning, was already powdery and odorless; but to Davy the scent of death was everywhere and the brief respite the night before was almost obliterated.

Most of the ride back was as silent as the trip out. Ken was broken with grief, Doug seemed to be chastened — still amazed by the discovery that his name, his protection, his will, were not proof against death. He shook his head once in a tiny dazed gesture of disbelief, and his fingers played absently with a minute flying emblem in his lapel.

"Stop that, for Christ's sake!" Ken burst out without even glancing back. For an instant, neither Davy nor Doug knew what he meant. "Every time you touch that lousy little propeller, I see the crash all over again. Do you have to wear it?"

There was another moment of shocked silence and then Doug said quietly, "Margot was my wife, Ken."

"Then why the hell didn't you take care of her? Why did you let her fly?"

"Are you *blaming* me?" Doug asked slowly.

"If she hadn't flown, she'd be here today!"

Doug's hands pressed down on Ken's shoulder so tightly that Davy saw the whitened knuckles.

"Listen, boy," Doug said in a voice that was almost a whisper. "She was the only woman I ever loved and the only one I'll love for the rest of my life. I know what she meant to you, and that's the only reason I'm not throwing you out of this car. You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I know exactly what I'm talking about," Ken replied. "What makes you think you're such a big mystery? You're getting just the kind of show you wanted, with you as the hero. You've got a procession of thirty cars behind you to prove how heartbroken you are, and a governor, a congressman, a mayor and half-a-dozen motorcycle cops to watch you shed your tears. There'll be pictures in the papers—Air Ace Bereaved by Air Crash. What time are you leaving town for the next episode of Vollrath Conquers the World?"

Doug turned to Davy with angry bewilderment, and for the first time Davy sensed the depth of his hurt. His refusal to reply in kind to Ken was due to far more than a sense of decorum. There was a need in his eyes, a plea and a humility that Davy had never dreamed the man could feel.

"Be quiet," Davy commanded his brother. "That can all wait until we're out of the car—until we get home."

"And where's home?" Ken demanded.

"My house," Doug said slowly. "Until we leave for Chicago or until Davy gets married, that's home for all of us. She's gone, but we're going to go ahead and do everything the way she wanted it. You two and I are going to have to get along from now on. As soon as we pull ourselves together, we're going to arrange for the financing and the merger. We're not only partners, but we're brothers."

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Ken exclaimed with bitter contempt. "Davy and I get along only because we've worked together all our lives—we're used to each other—"

"You'll get used to me too," Doug said in his tired, dogged voice. "I know everything your sister wanted for you and I'm going to see that you get it. That's the responsibility she left me." He was absolutely sincere, and Davy saw that if Doug was playing a role, then he himself was his most convinced spectator. Yet in the back of Davy's mind were the faces of Mel Thorne and Carl Bannerman like faded election posters that cling to telephone poles years after lost campaigns—dressed-up faces photographed at the height of hope but now washed and bleached by successive rains, snows and summer suns, and lined with rust that had dripped down from nails; still that ancient hope

shows through with haunting persistence. But Doug was blind to all old election posters as he deeply immersed himself in the new campaign. "She had her heart set on the wedding, and so we're going to have that wedding. She was prepared to back you in a fight with Westinghouse, and so we'll get ready to go to war."

"People join the army as privates, not as generals," Ken said. "You're going to back us, not lead us."

The color in Doug's face deepened and his mouth grew thin; but before he could reply, Davy broke in again.

"There is only one way we can work together," he said with sudden insight. "And I'm going to put it as the one condition, Ken, that I go along with you. In any organization, corporation or partnership that's set up, *I'm* to be the head, president, or senior partner. My feeling is that we barely stand a prayer to get through, and I don't trust either of you to do the job."

Vicky's face was white. "All of you — you ought to be ashamed!" she burst out. "Here we are, just returning from Margot's funeral —"

"And who do you think we've been talking about all along?" Davy said, breaking in on her, for now he was immovable. He turned away from her and faced the men with a deadly seriousness that was not diminished by the bitter lightness of his remark. "Well, brothers, what's your pleasure? We might as well hold that election right now!"

6

Davy and Vicky waited two weeks after the funeral to be married. The date was set by the pressures arising from the new organization's negotiations. Doug seemed to awaken from his half trance of grief into an explosive restlessness. He pressed Vicky into service as his temporary confidential secretary and she in turn hired two more girls. He used his own home as his office and had three additional telephones installed. He was in constant conversation with New York and Chicago, but most of his correspondence was by wire. There was no time to waste. Within four days, he announced definitely that their permanent headquarters were going to be in Chicago; and on the following day, he told Davy that they would both have to go to New York to see several banking people; Kuhn, Loeb had made the most attractive proposition. Ken was to have everything cleared out of the workshop, crated and shipped to the laboratories being prepared

for them in the Stewart-Janney Building on North Michigan Avenue.

"We'll have to be in New York for at least two weeks," Doug said. "You might as well make it a honeymoon too."

"I'll have to speak to Vicky."

"I've already talked to her," Doug replied with the calm assumption of an older brother's authority. For far more than he had adopted Ken and Davy, he had also taken Vicky under his wing. He was almost sententious in his lectures to Davy on the qualities of promise he had discovered in Vicky. This, more than anything, called for Davy to hang onto his patience.

"Look, Doug," he finally burst out. "You don't have to tell me about Vicky. I *know*."

"I wasn't criticizing her, I was only telling you what I noticed."

"I didn't say you were criticizing her. I just don't want to *talk* about her. Not to anyone. When you get to know me better, you'll see that there's one way more than any other in which I don't make sense. I don't *talk* about the people I care for, and when other people try to bring them up as topics of conversation, I go all stiff inside. I could never talk about Ken to anyone else except to say 'Ken wants this,' or 'Ken went there'—The same for Margot, the same for Vicky. So don't ask me to talk. And listening to someone else do it is just as hard for me."

Doug's face showed that he felt painfully rebuffed.

"Nobody's beyond judgment," he said.

"I'm always passing judgment on the people I care about," Davy replied. "But I do it by myself and keep it to myself. I didn't mean to kick you in the teeth, Doug. Maybe someday I won't be able to talk about you, either."

To Davy, it was obvious that Doug had not changed at all and that, sooner or later, the will to dominate would have to be met. But Davy had no intention of issuing his challenge on anything but the central issue. He would have preferred to be married in the City Hall, but Doug had gone ahead and arranged for a private religious ceremony in St. James's, "as Margot would have wanted it."

On the morning of the wedding, Davy and Ken worked together in the shop crating the apparatus and records. At eleven o'clock, Norton Wallis appeared; Vicky was with him, radiant in a light-gray suit. They were accompanied by Doug, looking like a grave young man who knew his family responsibilities.

"You'd better hurry," Doug said, glancing at his wrist watch. "I set

eleven-thirty purposely just so you can catch the twelve-fifteen to Milwaukee."

"And if the minister had to wait five minutes, what about it?" Ken demanded. He was already dressed beneath his overalls. He had only to put on a collar, tie and coat, but he was nettled by Doug's still unchallenged possessiveness.

"Nothing," Doug replied coldly. "The minister will just wait."

For Doug too, Davy saw, was not ready to pick up the latent challenge on anything but the central issue. At that moment, they were all waiting and wary, committed to a future together that had an infinite skein of tangles to be resolved. Everyone knew the dangers and respected them, and even though there were three opposing determinations not to yield, there were also three separate wills set upon making the joint venture a success. Everything was against them — the besieging force of their competitors from the outside as well as the disparity of their own interests within the citadel. There was no resource but their energy and youth; yet even youth — if youth meant only distance from death — had lost its infinite promise.

This was the moment when each of them had finally obtained exactly the dream that had always been longed for — and it was, for that reason, the moment of greatest uncertainty. Dreams are only silhouettes thrown upon a screen; but when the screen is dropped, the face of reality beyond the screen is scarred with sorrow, struggle, disappointment and compromise.

Vicky too was waiting. Of them all, she was the calmest, because she had passed through the haze of one dream into its ultimate disillusion and then onward, so that she no longer had anything but patience with what was to come for her and her own instinctive determination to make the best of things bend somehow to her will. By her side stood the old man who was the silent guarantee of her strength.

Davy smiled at her as he broke the tension by putting down the portfolio in his hand.

"Nobody will have to wait for us," he said good-humoredly. "We're ready now — for the minister, the train, for everything. Let's go."

813.5

W 75/m

C.2

My brother, my enemy. main
813.5W751m C.2



3 1262 03227 8805

Withdrawn from UF. Surveyed to Internet Archive

Withdrawn from UF. Surveyed to Internet Archive

